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CRISPIN KEN.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "MIRIAM MAY."

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OF

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Crispin Ken.



CHAPTER I.

Of a Slow Poison.



RISPIN KEN, whatever he might do, could not hide out of sight the face of Ruy Lyle, all that night long. He was ill at ease with himself that those few words thrown out against a hag, which might very well have meant nothing, to him should seem to mean so much.

Crispin Ken would have thought nothing of them, but he could not quite put away from memory the face of Mr. Lyle, when he had just let drop those words—

let them drop, just as he did everything, as though it was quite easy for him to let them drop about, and that it mattered nothing what came of them.

Crispin had quite made up his mind that from that day what was called the "influence" of this man, Ruy Lyle, would never again be anything at all to him ; and Crispin, as he turned restlessly in his bed, thought very ill of himself for giving any of his faith to anything that Mr. Lyle, perhaps so carelessly, had said.

He had heard Mona say, more times than one, that she could often hear the step of Mr. Lyle when Mr. Lyle was not within many miles. He had heard her say, whilst she seemed to fear to look round when she said it, that she had seen his face when it was very clear that he was nowhere within sight at all. He had even lately come to think that there might be something in it. Something in what ? he asked himself. The world would think him a fool for thinking such a thing ; and he thought he was a fool himself.

He

He sat up in his bed and tried to get above the hideous fancy that occupied his brain. Crispin Ken could see as far as most into other men. It was not his way to adopt the popular estimate of respectable motives in what are called "religious men," and Crispin Ken had a long time been held to account for his "want of charity."

But he believed he was a very fool now, to confess that a man who he could only feel was quite the choicest religious actor out, must have a very large capacity for seeming to be other than what he was. Crispin Ken did not care to confess to himself that the "influence" of Mr. Lyle, however it might be put out, could at all reach him. There was something in the man that set aside antagonism. When you the most wanted to pick him to pieces, he was thinking out some benevolent Protestant novelty. Crispin Ken had tried to quarrel with Ruy Lyle, and it had ended in Mr. Lyle giving Crispin Ken the curacy without condition.

Crispin had thought to have satisfied himself that Mr. Lyle was haunted with the memory of some unhallowed past, that he was only the good man, he was set down to be, under the world's eye. But, beyond the world's eye, Crispin, as the clergyman of the place, could not deny to himself that it was very hard to think even indifferently well of anything that Ruy Lyle might do. The past, however much unhallowed, did not greatly seem to move this man, so that Crispin had nearly thought sometimes that the past could not be very hideous.

But that night Crispin thought that it was, and as he sat up in his bed he did not think it could be anything but very hideous. That the "influence" of Ruy Lyle should have ever made itself, even for a moment felt, was more than Crispin Ken could bear to think ; and a cold and heavy damp stood upon his brow, as he struggled to set himself against the man who he, in his heart, knew was false, and still waited for the worship of the world.

And

And what could Ruy Lyle have meant? Meg was strange and wild, and sometimes something more—sometimes as though she was acting a part, but it hardly seemed a part to be suspected.

Crispin had gone, with the sting of the words that had so worked upon him, up to the bed-side of John Wycherley, meaning then and there to crush whatever might remain of the suspicion. And the suspicion he had fought against, when he got there, had the rather grown. Meg was by the bed-side of John Wycherley; the cup in her hand, which she had seemed to force to his but little yielding lips; and when he had come she had started and looked pale; and why was she there at all just then?

Crispin Ken did not want to think upon the words of Ruy Lyle but as a half-dared lie—a detestable suspicion. Still Ruy Lyle did not ask him to go as he had gone to Wycherley's; nor was it the doing of Ruy Lyle that Meg should have herself stood there to strengthen the suspicion.

It was still night, and as it grew on, Crispin Ken felt more and more as he turned from side to side, that he had better give up every thought of sleeping. The woman standing by the side of that bed, and the face of agony that looked upon her, and then the face of Ruy Lyle, that in an omnipresent way had seemed with its unimpressible outline to come upon the scene, came back and stood out clearly; and it was very hard to see how the death of John Wycherley would be a gain to Meg or to any other woman, or indeed to any man.

The hands that are raised to take away a life are generally few or many, as the life that is taken has little or much to leave. It is a waste of energy to contrive away the being of a pauper. It may be that the pauper stands between some one else and an inheritance, and then the pauper is quite worth any design for his removal. But Crispin Ken had often heard John Wycherley say that he was alone in the world. It was impossible to
believe

believe that any one could want to kill a man who was alone in the world—who lived on fifty pounds a year—it could lead to nothing. So from a business point of view he should be safe.

Whatever it might be, Crispin determined that he would know what it should mean that night.

John Wycherley had now been ill for many months. He had, so far as could be seen, first sickened on that night in December, and now it had been some time spring. For days together he had not known what it was to be at rest. There was that on his face which had startled others, and which had at last come to startle himself. The doctor had been at some pains to find out the cause, but the symptoms had baffled him so far. And John Wycherley was often heard to say that it was nothing. That he had a sickness very like it before, and that he should get better soon. But he was sometimes so bad, that it was hardly thought by those about him, that there was at all
B 4 the

the strength within him to get better ; and whilst there were those who were thinking this, he would mend and walk abroad, and look again as he had looked before, before he had been so seized, after drinking the mulled wine which Mr. Lyle had made.

Meg at no time was ever very long from John Wycherley's bed-side, and she was never once away when Mr. Lyle called upon the curate. Meg always, it was said, seemed to hang about the owner of the Hall ; but no one could tell how much or how little the owner of the Hall might like it. He showed nothing that he felt. Indeed, latterly, Meg the more often passed the night at the house of Wycherley, watching by his side, and it was this knowledge that perhaps, as much as the feeling to hurl back the suspicion, led Crispin Ken to get up before it was day, and see what he could do to set aside the mystery.

A few minutes' hard walking brought him to Wycherley's home.

Crispin

Crispin knocked at the door, which was opened by Meg. Crispin looked into the woman's face by the little light of the dawning day, but she met his searching eye unmoved — unmoved as the untainted outcast sleeping on a stone meets the bull's eye glare.

She at any rate could look him in the face, which was more than could be said of her accuser, and yet she had hardly been accused. The world has a great many respectable ways of doing this, and Mr. Lyle had taken up the most respectable — the one that modern society — where there are ever so many quiet Christians purveying “Evangelicalism” to even weaker minds — has created to meet its own necessities; that which says the least, and means the most.

Crispin was as satisfied as he wanted to be from that woman's face, that he had come far enough, and might go back to his bed; but he almost felt, he did not know why, that Mr. Lyle would be glad

if he went back ; so he was minded to go on.

“ Is Mr. Wycherley better, Meg,” said Crispin ; “ I could not sleep for thinking of him.”

“ He is not very well, he has been sick enough, and seems a little better.”

“ It’s a strange illness, Meg ;” and Crispin thought of what Mr. Lyle had said, “ sometimes better, sometimes worse, but oftener worse.”

“ So I used to think,” said the woman, looking vacantly — “ I don’t think it is strange now.”

Crispin tried to read what the woman meant, but that blank face said nothing.

“ And do you think that now you know the cause ? ” he said.

“ I don’t think so much about it ; may be that’s because I’m accustomed to it.”

“ It’s very strange,” said Crispin, who hardly knew what next to say ; but the more he saw the more he was sure that nothing could be laid to the account of Meg.

Crispin

Crispin now began to feel what he had sometime wanted to feel, that the "influence" of Ruy Lyle was no longer any influence over him at all; and he even thought he could have now looked in that man's face, and been nothing moved.

"What's this he drinks, Meg?" said Crispin, holding up the cup.

"Something to cool him when he burns;" and Meg met the question as Crispin hoped she would.

"Do you think he'll get over it, Meg?"

"That depends," said Meg.

"Depends on what?" asked Crispin, as though he was getting a little nearer where he wanted to be.

"On whether he lives," said the woman, fencing.

"If you think you know what's the matter with John Wycherley, you ought to say, Meg; it is told hereabouts that you know more than you will tell."

"And that's what brought you here a while ago, and has brought you here now, out of your bed. I know *what's* been said

against me, and better than well who said it ;” and Meg as she spoke came up to Crispin, and looked him through and through.

“ I *have* heard something, Meg, but I don’t believe it, and I didn’t believe it, at least not quite ;” and Crispin remembered the suspicion which so short a time before had been so hard to overcome.

“ Then why did you come here, if you didn’t believe it ? ”

“ I did not want to satisfy myself, Meg, but I wanted to be able to satisfy others.”

“ And you most wanted to satisfy this man, Ruy Lyle, that there’s not a slow poison in that cup,—something slow, but that will do its work gently ; that’s what brought you here.”

Crispin started as he heard the word — the word he did not want to hear — spoken by that woman. It was strange that she should know of the suspicion, and do so little to remove it ; but then it was something stranger that she should speak of it.

Crispin

Crispin took the cup into his hand ; he would not go from his purpose now.

“Look you, Meg, if I drink half what is in this cup, will you drink what’s left?”

“I’ll drink it all, if that’s what you want,” said Meg, seizing the cup before he knew what her purpose was, and she would have drained it, had he not forced it from her lips, and drank himself the little that was left.

She did not look as though, by her own act, she had just then taken a slow poison ; nor could Crispin feel, as he looked into that woman’s face, that poison was in his own blood.

“You don’t know so much more now than you did before,” said Meg, meaningly ; “but you think you do.”

Crispin Ken had put away what had at all remained of a very thin and poor suspicion. It was not poison, he could now believe, that brought that agony to Wycherley, that brought those burning lips, those burning eyes. He could face Mr. Lyle and tell him so. He would
have

have given a great deal to have told it him then, and as he was wishing it were day, that he might go to Mr. Lyle at once, there was a knock against the outer door, and Mr. Lyle himself walked in.

Crispin Ken would have given something just then if it had suited Mr. Lyle to look him in the face; but it did not suit Mr. Lyle, and Crispin was obliged to say what he wanted to have looked.

“Are you often here this time of night, Mr. Lyle?” asked Crispin.

“Not often, Mr. Ken, indeed, never before.”

“Then why are you here now?” said Crispin, seeking a quarrel, but not so much as able to get away the smile that stood upon the lips of Mr. Lyle. Crispin was a little taken back; the man before him always seemed the same; that smile seemed always there, no matter if the day was young or old; “but I’m not sorry that you’ve come,” continued Crispin, “that I may tell you what’s the worth of your suspicion, Mr. Lyle.”

“Suspicion !

“Suspicion! Mr. Ken.”

“Yes, suspicion, Mr. Lyle; if I did use the word it was because you wanted me to learn how to apply it to this woman.”

Mr. Lyle sat himself upon a chair, and looked more unimpressible and mild than ever.

“I do not think, Mr. Ken, that any word of mine bore that application. But as we are here, it is as well perhaps that we should satisfy each other. I suspect no one; but it may be that you do.”

Crispin would have liked to have fallen upon the cool, unmoved, impenetrable man—just then the head and hope of the “religious world”—who sat with nothing but a smile upon his face before him.

“Mr. Lyle, when I came here there was a cup upon that table; this woman and I together drained it.”

“As you came here then, Mr. Ken, the better to be satisfied, and to be convinced that some suspicion you had harboured was not just, would it not be better that
what

what is in *all* the cups should now be tasted ; perhaps that woman would reach the one that's standing yonder."

Meg, for a minute, seemed bound to where she was ; but it was only for a minute that she seemed so. Full into his face she looked ; but there was no change on those unalterable lines. A sound broke from her lips, which was only like a moan ; she crossed the room to reach the cup, and as she took it up it fell upon the floor.

In it's breaking it awoke John Wycherley ; but Crispin Ken could not forget that moan, or how the cup had fallen out of Meg's shaking hand, and so was broken. He was not sure, but that he did begin to suspect ; and what was more, he could see that Ruy Lyle knew he was beginning to suspect ; but the waking of John Wycherley, for the moment, stayed the thoughts that so tormented him.

Crispin sat down by the bed-side, and took Wycherley's hot hand in his own.

"I wish he was not here, he is always here now," Crispin heard him whisper.

This

This was enough for Crispin, who turned to interpret the words aloud to Mr. Lyle; but before he could speak, John Wycherley had asked Mr. Lyle to stay—to stay on there and pray with him, and read God's Word to him. It was more than Crispin Ken could bear to see the acting out over that book, of what he felt was no mean lie—to see that man kneeling there to pray, and reading out God's Word. And it was harder to bear that Ruy Lyle should do it whilst Crispin Ken, a clergyman himself, was there. It was, so much more than he could bear—Meg's groan still in his ear—that he determined, as he never had determined anything before, that he would see the end of it upon the morrow.

So far suspicion did not rest in the direction that Crispin Ken had believed it would; but he did not the less think that it had cause to rest there.

It had been always said of Crispin Ken, "that he thought ill of everybody." This is very often said and written of those who
see

see the world as it is, and tell it out. The world, as it is, likes this very little; and the offenders in this sort of way are heaped together as "uncharitable enough" in its award. It had been a long while said of Crispin Ken that he was "uncharitable;" that he saw the "dark side;" that he "made out dark sides for the liking he had for them;" and "Evangelical Protestantism" is said to be a remedy against this distempered sort of seeing. You have only to go into an "Evangelical" chapel on a Sabbath morning, and after you have paid the inexorable shilling, and heard the free adaptation of the Liturgy, you will be congratulated on the respectability of the Square you live in, or the good that your Street does. It is pleasant to be told that your Street does good, and that if your side of the way holds on, nothing can stop it from going to God. Society thereabouts, at any rate, is doing very decently. You are going on very comfortably. You may just as well see the "bright side;" and you go home thinking, that after all,
going

going to heaven is a comfortable thing to do on earth; and you take the bright side of your street; and you might have thought your neighbour's house, which he gave out as painted, to be only washed; but you think of the sermon. You do not put it down as a deception to your neighbour, or the decorator. You know it is distemper, but you pronounce for paint.

Now Crispin Ken always pronounced for whitewash when he saw it. It had been one of Reuben Ken's great troubles. He thought it best for the young to believe in nothing but good. The belief would not be a bad one if we could have a different world to believe it in.

There are some people who would stand where the grass is bare on Primrose Hill, on their Saturday half-holiday, and declare that the air is pure. The little lads out of Holborn think it's grass is green. It were better they should think it's air is pure and its grass green. They will never breathe air that is purer or see what is greener. It would not do to tell them
that

that the hill was a cheat, and the air a sham. They would tell the man who said it that he could see nothing that was bright. They would even tell this to the man who had stood upon the Himalayas.

Crispin Ken, it was believed, set himself against everything he saw, and it was so interpreted because *what* he saw, he *said* he saw. Society was as willing as it ever is to tell him what he must love and what he must hate—what he must always call respectable. Society was rather sorry it had ever brought him where he found out unsuspected wind-bags in high places, and then pricked them.

Crispin Ken did not disguise from himself that the “influence” of Mr. Lyle had at some time overcome him. It was an influence he could hardly accuse, but that he must suspect. The power that this man held so largely over others—and held with such little show—had reached him ; and so far as it could be seen, it was a power for good.

To the eye or to the mind, Mr. Lyle
was

was no mere "Evangelical" religionist. He *was* an "Evangelical," but he brought to his professions a capacity which might have given permanence to that sectarianism. To have put out all his strength would have been to show in those he led their weakness. Crispin Ken believed the life of this man to be a lie. The belief was in the face of a high influence for good that was witnessed by the world. Crispin Ken had thought he saw what was real, behind the counterfeit; but no one saw the counterfeit. He did not know why or how he saw it. It could be only solved one way—he must be of course "uncharitable."

Meg had dropped the cup, but Crispin Ken believed it was because of Ruy Lyle she dropped it. The "influence" of Mr. Lyle he knew could do yet greater things than make those feeling it drop cups. He had seen Meg give drink to Wycherley. He had never seen this done by Mr. Lyle. But Crispin had now mastered the detested influence that man once had over him, and
he

he abhorred himself that it had ever held him even for so short a while.

But Mr. Lyle would give no cause for any quarrel. As Mona's guardian he never put the power of his office forward; nor did he at all force himself on Crispin. The world would not look well on any one who could think ill of such a man — so much above his kind. It was quite certain that this man was far above his kind. His was not the superiority that the "Evangelical" platform furnishes. It was not so showy. It did not let in the light, even the light of the month of May.

It was this man whom Crispin Ken charged in his own mind with living out a lie. The life of Ruy Lyle a lie! Exeter Hall was much more likely to become a theatre. Crispin knew that no one would see what he saw. He did not ask himself whether he had no suspicion against Meg, but he meant to tell the doctor that he had a good deal against Ruy Lyle. The doctor had latterly resided at St. Hilda's,
and

and soon after breakfast Crispin went to speak out what he had to say.

“ John Wycherley is not so well again ?” said Crispin, putting it as though he asked a question.

“ He is better again this morning. It is very strange. I never saw a case quite like it ; sometimes better, sometimes worse, as Mr. Lyle was only saying yesterday.”

“ He said that to me ; he thinks something of these symptoms ; it may be that he knows how much they mean.”

“ I never saw any one at all like him,” said the doctor, “ were Mr. Wycherley his son he could not well be much more like a father to him.”

This was quite what Crispin Ken expected. He had come there to speak out, and whatever might come of it he meant to speak.

“ John Wycherley has been like this for months. Did you ever set it down to any unknown cause ?”

“ He tells me he has suffered from such
attacks

attacks before. I have seen cases very like it."

"And from natural causes?"

"From natural causes; but may I inquire why you ask?"

"Because I do not think Wycherley is ill from any natural cause—I suspect that that is given him which makes him ill."

"You do not—?"

"I suspect that he is being poisoned—it is in his face; you cannot look at him and not see poison."

The two men searched each other's faces, as though they thought to see there, what they did not dare to tell aloud in words.

"I thought so once myself," said the doctor, pacing the room uneasily as though perhaps he thought it then again, "but every test could not discover it."

Crispin smiled—the man on whom his worst suspicion rested, would not do the thing so clumsily.

"But whom do you suspect?—I would answer with my life for Meg."

"It matters not whom I suspect," said
Crispin,

Crispin, "I am only sure that Wycherley is dying from slow poison—yet I am sure I don't know why; but least of any man or woman in this world, I should suspect Mad Meg."

"And none but those from your own house are ever there?"

"No one else—but Mr. Lyle."

"No one else, but Mr. Lyle? It is not every one has such a nurse." The doctor did not take at all; he would have as soon suspected Exeter Hall of being a London branch of the Vatican, as that Mr. Lyle could manipulate slow poisons; so he went back to speak of Meg.

"I think I understand you. I suspect nothing myself; but I will give orders that this woman does not go near Mr. Wycherley, and indeed that no one does but Mr. Lyle."

"That no one does, not excepting Mr. Lyle," said Crispin.

"I do not think I could ask *him*; and John Wycherley's well-being would take

nothing by it. Mr. Lyle has been everything to him."

"He has been quite that," said Crispin, wanting to spit out the suspicion.

"I will speak to Mr. Wycherley myself, and tell him cautiously to watch; then, if there be cause for what you tell me you suspect, I will see if London can detect the poison. I will speak to Wycherley at once."

As he spoke he left the room, and Crispin was perfectly satisfied, from what he had just seen, that Mr. Lyle would be the last suspected.

John Wycherley heard it, much as he would that, which he had perhaps half felt to be the truth before.

"Mr. Ken wishes none may come," said the doctor, "not excepting Mr. Lyle."

"I would rather Mr. Lyle did come, I do not know what I should do without him. Tell Crispin not to say a word to Mr. Lyle."

And this was told to Crispin, who all along had thought to hear it.

It

It was the evening of the same day. Mr. Lyle had seen John Wycherley ; had read and prayed with him ; and had left. The sick man had urged him to stop rather later than usual, though he felt to want to sleep.

It was nearly ten o'clock, when, between sleeping and waking, he thought he heard a footstep on the floor, and John Wycherley without moving opened his eyes. Meg was stealing across the room, as though she feared to make a noise, with a cup in her hand. He saw her pass out, and as he remembered what had been said, a cold sweat stood upon his skin—the half-veiled caution of the doctor seemed too real.

The doctor came again to see him about midnight, and Wycherley, after being questioned, reluctantly told what he had seen.

“ I do not suspect her,” said the doctor, “ I cannot suspect her ; she can have no cause ; but I must find this cup ; there is no known test but what shall be applied this time.”

And then he added, "Meg, meanwhile, must know nothing of it all."

It was not difficult for the doctor, from Wycherley's description of the cup, to find it the next morning. He took enough of what was in it to serve every purpose, and left the remainder where it was.

The doctor sought out Crispin before leaving, Crispin putting the story he was told and the broken cup together, but saw nothing in it as against the woman.

"Keep Meg from him whilst I'm away, and let us see whether he gets better."

"I do not think he will." But Crispin Ken was wrong; for John Wycherley grew better every day.

To have said aloud that he suspected Ruy Lyle, Crispin knew would matter nothing; and if he judged by what he saw between the woman and the man, whatever witness there might be, seemed setting in against the woman.

And there was no change in Ruy Lyle. He was as pale as when he came there, but not one tint more pale. Suspicion
would

would not set against him long, even if it was once set going. He did not look like one who could take his place, unasked by the side of the form of death, which was his own contriving. You could ill see in him the side that was not bright. A world that set some price on an example, could not well believe in crime in him. Could he sit by, and in the life before him, see the devilry work out its own slow measure? Could the guilty put back years of guilt and wrest away its mark? Was it for the damned to wipe away its sign, and with the chemistry of hell work death, and talk of Heaven?

By the everlasting's side, the nightshade grows, in the hedge-rows of the world.

CHAP. II.

The Mill Race.

JOHN WYCHERLEY had never ceased to get better after Meg was kept from his bed-side. Meg did not much understand the order, and said she was sure he would die now; and her words seemed full of meaning. But he did not die, and for some weeks had not looked so well inclined to live.

Meg went to Crispin to set out her troubles.

“It is not my doing, Meg,” he said; “the doctor gave word that no one must go near him—that is, no one but—”

“Yes, it isn’t hard to see in to; no one but Ruy Lyle, and only him.”

“I

"I don't know why, Meg, the doctor does not like to speak to Mr. Lyle; he fears it might offend him."

"He is a big fool," said Meg; "but no one can see through Ruy Lyle—no one can feel his influence to be the cursed thing it is. It isn't surely very hard to be the head of the 'religious world.'"

"I do not think well of what you call his influence, Meg. I once thought it was too strong for me; but I have cast that wretched feeling off. Whatever he may do, I see him as he is."

"And what is that? What does he look like to you?"

"I hardly like to say; but I have often thought that this man, Ruy Lyle, is haunted by the memory of some fearful crime, that —"

"I didn't say so, did I? — don't tell *him* what I said."

"You said nothing, Meg."

"Are you sure I didn't say a word?"

"Quite sure, Meg; but you said that Wycherley will die if Mr. Lyle goes near
c 4 him;

him; and yet, ever since you left, John Wycherley has been getting better."

"I see it all," Meg said, as though trying to get at more than she yet saw. "I see it all, Wycherley will get better for a bit, that *I* may be suspected—suspected that I want *his* life. I—*is there this suspicion now?*" and Meg spoke these words as though her whole hereafter in this world would rest upon the answer. "You don't speak; you are quite still; you don't say anything; they think I want to kill him, I, who couldn't live without him—but you won't tell them all he is to me."

This was how Meg was always talking now; as though the past would be always rising up, pointing to some resurrection that was more than she could bear, and which was worse than she would have it known to be. But Crispin satisfied her that he had heard nothing.

Crispin, as has been said, had been always set down as "uncharitable." Society comes to this opinion very suddenly, when any one may happen to assert what

what he may see,—and society is not so very wrong to come to this opinion if it wants to live. Everything must be begun again, which might be inconvenient, if people were to tell out all they see. Everything is hollow; and perhaps from the platform world comes quite the greatest hollow that the world provides. But then, what a great variety of excellent, of “pious” men this seems to place in a false position! No one could walk up the Strand in the month of May, and believe that the platform business is a hollow one. None of the excellent and serious people, who are the committee of all the “Evangelical” societies, would believe it. Some people are of opinion that if the lease of Exeter Hall cannot be presently renewed, there will be an end to “Evangelical” religion, and no renewal possible. Others affect to convince themselves, that the world will be none the worse off, even did this happen, and that there may be a good deal of, of course, irregular religion, other than that which “Evangelicalism” con-

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siders best and safest. But if you begin to suspect the "Evangelical world," there can be no sort of stopping. It is at the head of everything in this country. It corresponds with weak people in the Protestant parts of the continent of Europe. It provides a perfectly sublime series of religious bankers. It puts up gentlemen to feed serious Magdalenes with thin bread and butter, and to see them to some "Home" in cabs. It is even believed lately to have raised up a First Minister at a trying crisis in the Church. But something has come between that remarkable "Evangelical" agency, which has a good deal shaken the regular religious world.

Two or three religious bankers, by getting too much out of the talents in their hands, have been placed in awkward situations—situations possibly grossly misconceived by the non-religious world. There have been the same painted faces, coming on a second night, for a second help of the bread and butter; and the providentially provided First Minister has turned out rather

rather "funny" for the head of "Evangelical Protestantism."

This, of course, may show how much, what is called the religious world, can stand and keep its place; but it may quite well also show that there is, perhaps, some unsuspected religion about, which never appears in the programmes of the "religious world." You cannot stop the "Evangelical world" being very exclusive and excluding you; but you will, if you can wait outside, have your innings when you see perhaps its chiefest belonging taken in a cab to Newgate. The cab goes on to Newgate, and its religious fare is left there; but the religion, which would have been dried up if it had been dependent anything on him, is nothing the worse for his sudden going out of the "religious world."

And Ruy Lyle, just then, was quite the first in this "religious world;" but Crispin Ken had not at all made up his mind that if Ruy Lyle should turn out ill, religion would have received anything to stagger it; whilst the "religious world" would

take care no moral inconvenience to itself should be applied; and it would only lose a life subscriber.

Crispin Ken, because he did not ever see Mr. Lyle, as all the world took occasion to see him, would have been set down as "uncharitable." This, after a good deal of casting about, has been adjudged the right word. A man is "uncharitable" who happens to be able to see that some one else, with a great platform reputation, is not all that the world takes him to be. People with this sort of learning are invited to answer the question why they like to look at the dark side. Perhaps the dark side a good deal preponderates. There is more that is bad than is good; indeed, we are told that none of us are good. But we are to look round, and tell faithfully what we see, and we are not to say we see the dark side.

It is rather well that the best society has lived too late in the history of the world, to be told that it is doing honour to a "generation of vipers." There are no
"vipers"

“vipers” about in these times in the “religious world;” or if there might be some, it does not altogether do to point them out.

When Ruy Lyle first broke on the “Evangelical world,” that organization was at last quite sure it had something it could believe in. As it set him up very high, and in the end above everything, there was no reason why the professions which were extorted did not fit him naturally.

Mr. Lyle “professed” very freely. It was always a success to get him in the chair. It was the next best thing to get out of him a letter of apology for not attending. He became a sort of public sponsor. To have secured Mr. Lyle for your child, was to have secured for your child Protestant priority in another world. To have suspected any “vipers,” in any generation of that man’s house, would have precipitated your moral end, and an end of a very bad sort. Your only chance might be that the religious print of his party would think you too indifferent for comment ;

ment; but then it might not think it; and then where you would go to, when you died, would be determined publicly.

Crispin Ken had long believed that Ruy Lyle was not what he seemed; but the world, protesting against imputing motives, would have thought his motive very bad for saying what he thought. He would have been invited to prove it. Society cannot have its Ruy Lyles suspected away. The "Evangelical world" must be protected. It must not be withered. The motives of its members must not be weighed,—at least there must be no scales exhibited in public.

There is a good deal of this weighing going just now; but it does not belong to the "charity" of the period to talk about it.

The doctor was quite certain Wycherley was better, because Meg was not suffered to come near him. Crispin the rather believed, that it was a part of the game of Mr. Lyle, that Wycherley should get better, that Meg might be the more readily suspected. The analyst to whom the
doctor

doctor had referred, what had been found in the cup, was just then away; and as Wycherley was so much better, it was thought the thing might rest until the chemist should return. So the doctor stayed in London, and Wycherley was once more seen amongst the living.

To Mona it had some time seemed as though the dead had claimed John Wycherley; but she had not thought that any one, when death had claimed him, could ever live after him in her own heart.

The image of Ruy Lyle she had got the better of. It was no longer within her to shut out other images she liked. Mr. Lyle would always be to her an influence, which the more it grew—if it did grow—would the less account of itself to her. But she no longer felt that to think of it was little loyal to Wycherley. It *was* an influence still; but it seemed to her to move wherever there was death. She did not think that it could overshadow her for good; and yet he was a great deal more than a commonly religious man; he

he was the leader of the religious world. She must believe herself wrong—she would have given a great deal to have believed it.

They were still the early days of mourning for the curate. Crispin saw no one at the Parsonage but Wycherley. It was impossible for Crispin to feel that Mr. Lyle had behaved otherwise than well throughout. He had never once intruded. Mona was his ward; but the last thing he did was to exercise his power.

The long illness of her father, and the sudden and unaccountable illness of John Wycherley, had had its influence on the health of Mona Ken; and it was at this time that Mr. Lyle called at the Parsonage.

He would be leaving, he said, a few days after Easter for London, for the session, as the "Great Liberal Party" wanted all its strength just then to carry on its apology for government. He had something to propose which he had thought might do Miss Ken some good, and would be no intrusion on her privacy.

Mr. Lyle had just completed a winter garden.

garden. There were acres under glass ; it was warmed to the summer heat of June ; and he thought, perhaps, they might cheat the weather and spend a day there.

Crispin could not very well object. The invitation included himself ; nor did he think it seemly that Mona should be always setting herself against her guardian. Besides, John Wycherley was asked to go, and so it was they went.

They were to meet at the Hall at twelve o'clock, and Mr. Lyle would show them all.

They had not heard a little said of what this garden was ; but when the reality was present, they found that expectation had not summoned up a picture such as that before them.

The mountains of Cumberland lent to the work of art a beautiful and grand background of nature, as they rose around on every side. The garden, under glass itself, was meant to look like a Swiss valley, and with the snow on the mountain tops outside—it often rests upon those tops until
the

the end of May—it seemed like Switzerland itself spread out.

All, for a moment, looked upon the scene in silence; all but Mr. Lyle, who, without affectation, stood unmoved, watching the successful issue of his own creation.

There were goats on the rocks; and before a chalet Mr. Lyle, for a minute, stopped. The door was opened by one who was dressed as a Swiss serving-man; and as they passed through, a lovely scene had opened up. Helvellyn closed it in—Helvellyn, hoar with snow. At their feet Switzerland in miniature; a cascade here, a mountain stream there. It was hard to feel that that was imitation. Mr. Lyle still led on, and turning a high-stretching rock, a dozen serving-men and women, all dressed as Swiss, were sitting round the good things they had come to serve.

Up to this it had been felt hardly possible, by any there, to speak—the mimic scene was perfect; a master-mind was in it all. It was not easy any longer, for the whole party, to conceal their admiration.

“ I

"I am glad you are pleased, Miss Ken," and that was all that Mr. Lyle was heard to say about it.

But it was not lost on Mona or on Wycherley.

"Mona, this might all be yours," was Wycherley's commentary. "He meant it should be yours. I never met the equal of this man in anything. He does everything well."

Mona shuddered, but she did not shudder because the air was chilly.

"Do not leave me for a moment, I would rather not be left with him alone," and Mona said this, feeling it might be that something of that man's power over her still lived. It was not exactly that he who had worked out such a place as this had offered it to her; it was not exactly that. Just then Mona did not further ask herself what it could mean.

"Miss Ken, will you take my arm?" and with Mona by his side, Mr. Lyle led the way to where the grass was spread before them.

Mona

Mona would have rather leant upon the arm of Wycherley ; anyhow she could not well decline the arm of Mr. Lyle, even had he not been her own guardian.

They sat till the day was drawing in, when some one proposed that they should walk beside the race outside.

The race led to the mill. Mona felt a little tired, and Wycherley thought it best that she should stay behind and rest ; and she stayed behind, and was glad to be able to look alone, with her own thoughts, upon that which was so beautiful before her.

And very long did Mona look upon that perfect scene ; and it might be hers ; but then she must be *bis* ; and for all that the air was very warm, she shuddered.

“You are cold, Miss Ken,” and Mr. Lyle went into the little chalet and brought out a shawl. That shawl must have cost a hundred guineas once, and that once might not have been so long ago.

It went against Mona very much to stay ; but she could not go away,—she
fancied

fancied it would be rude, and besides, he was offering to lead her to where the rest were walking by the race.

Little by little she tried to tell him what she thought of all that he had done to work that marvel out, when she was startled by a cry, the sound of which she thought she knew, and looking up saw Meg's idiot child beside them.

"It's nothing," said Mr. Lyle, as he wiped the soil from his coat, which the child had thrown upon him. "I wonder how it got in here;" but Ruy Lyle, master as he was of his own face at most times, was not its master then. He had never seemed to Mona as he seemed when the idiot's laugh first startled him and her. It was not that his coat was soiled, but that the child still threw the dirt in hideous play upon them, and shrieked at what it did.

Mona had never seen Ruy Lyle so little like himself before.

"Shall we join the rest, Miss Ken?" and that was all he said till Mona felt herself
once

once more by Wycherley. Mona and Wycherley returned to the winter garden; some others of the party, as the weather for the time was fine, still walking by the race.

An hour later, rumour had it that Meg's idiot child had been found drowned; no one seemed to know exactly how. That it had fallen, it was believed, into the race, while playing by the water-side; but other than this, it was even said by some, that Meg herself had done it.

The night was growing old when Crispin Ken stood within the door of Mad Meg's house. She was lying on the bed, the little corpse pressed to her breast, whilst she was breathing in it.

"*He* did it," she said madly, as she met Crispin at the door.

"Till the proper time shall come, say nothing, Meg."

"Say nothing about what? Jim can't be dead; he isn't gone, or else there's nothing left for me," and she returned to breathe

breathe her hot breath upon the lips of the now chilled clay.

"If he'd only open his eyes and say — chuck! chuck!"

To Meg, "chuck! chuck!" was all that Jim had ever said.

"No one ever loved him but me," she said, as Crispin tried to lead her from the room; and she clung to Crispin as she whispered in his ear and pointed to the corpse, "Will they take to him more kindly like up there?"

"Jim is amongst the company of heaven, Meg; don't wish him back, he is very happy now."

And she fell at Crispin's feet. Meg did not know what she said then, but something of her boy strayed into every sound.

"They won't know what he means by chuck! chuck! up there."

And for all that Crispin Ken could do, she kneeled upon the bed, to tell the angels what Jim meant, through that night long.

CHAP. III.

The Inquest.

SOCIETY subscribes rather liberally to asylums for idiots, on hilly places. It will always put down its funds for any number of wings, to make these sort of hospitals hold the most.

It is felt not to be altogether a pleasant kind of thing to see the silly about in the streets; so society contrives large airy buildings, and shuts up what it does not like to see. Then what are so shut up only need to be thought of twice a year, when you have to sign some paper, and send it to some secretary, and are canvassed by the candidates father or mother, or by the male of the two parents, who comes to tell you that

that his wife has had two idiots in two years, and has added that to the circle which promises to be a third. One pound one, which gives you the opportunity of being benevolent, is not much to help to shut up one of the family. You would not like to meet it about the streets, or to see it making sad faces in the road, when you were passing by.

Asylums may very well be filled by rather less interested motives than these; and there are yet, thank God, those few, unchilled by the formal charity that airs itself upon committees, who give their guineas for a better end than to hide away the idiot and the fool. And society might really very well take thought, how often it shuts up the idiot, and lets loose the fool.

Now, that little Jim was dead, those who felt it worth the while to speculate how the idiot had been found drowned in the race, said, "that they were not surprised at the catastrophe; and that it clearly came of not shutting 'it' up." Jim had all along been "it." There were so many fine

asylums in the country to which they subscribed, to keep these senseless things from dreadful deaths.

Meg was to have shut up all she loved, and all that could love her, and go and see it by way of a great privilege on those days permitted by the "board;" and then look at it through the bar, as it stood side by side with other faces without light, as she left it—very comfortable it might be—in its airy ward behind.

Meg, for all that might be said to her as to the leniency of the rules or the healthfulness of the situation, could not give up Jim to any airy ward. And, now "it" was dead and gone from her, large-hearted people reminded her, with the large-hearted feeling which is regular, that she should have shut it up. And when she heard it said, Meg hugged the little corpse, and tried to warm it back to life, to spit at her again, though it had now been clay two days.

"Spit at me, Jim. Chuck! chuck!"

This had been Jim's greatest treat, to spit on passers-by, and run away.

Meg

Meg had never closed her eyes since the body had been found, and brought to the surface of the race in her own arms. To her Jim's look was not like death; and it was only towards the evening of the second day that she came to see that he was dead.

Jack Ken had hardly left her; but it was only a few hours before the time arrived, which had been appointed for the inquest, that Meg, who had taken a great liking to the boy, seemed then at all to know him.

Meg had got the corpse in her arms, and was struggling with the rigid limbs, whilst Jack was doing gently all he knew to get her to put the body down.

Jim's only a bit cold since *he* pushed him in the water;—*be* don't think I saw. If he'd only left me Jim, it's likely I should have held my tongue; but I shan't hold it more than a bit longer now; and I have got something, too, that I can say; but it will wait. Jim!—Jim! he wont warm, Jack," and she kneeled down and kissed the lips of the chilled clay. She started

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from that touch of ice ;—the worst was coming to Mad Meg. It had been peace to her to what it would be soon ; she was coming round to know the worst that man or woman can know here—to know that she was alone.

Jack had himself seen others, in his short life, with as much as they could bear, and some it well might be with more ; but on this wise he had never seen despair, when Meg fixed her sunken eyes upon him and said, as the cold kiss still left its clinging chill, “ he’ll never be warm again, Jack. I’m alone in the world, now. Oh, my God, how I have been accursed these many years through *him*.”

This was how Meg always spoke of Ruy Lyle ; and there was that in the manner of her speech, which seemed to say, that the worst thing that she was called upon to bear was, that she might not tell out what he was.

The doctor had only returned from London on the morning of the inquest, about an hour before the inquiry began ;
and

and he, in the first place, went to Crispin Ken.

“I am very sorry to say that something has been found. It baffled almost every test; but it came out at last.”

“I am not surprised that it should,” said Crispin; “nor am I surprised that it should have been so nearly undetectable; the agent here is no mere clumsy fool.”

“And yet,” said the doctor, in a tone of some surprise, “I always thought you felt that you could trust this woman, Meg.”

“There has been nothing found that inclines me to alter that opinion; but there has been something found that would confirm it.”

“The cup was seen in her hand; it was afterwards found in her house; and there has been that found in it which leaves no doubt how Wycherley’s illness was fully caused.”

“I never questioned it; but I do not see that this brings home the crime to this woman.”

“I do not think a jury would want much more to convince them; and my duty in this matter is clear. Mr. Lyle is a magistrate—”

“Whose interference in this matter it might not best aid justice to seek,” said Crispin. “I hope you may not think it inconsistent with the severest duty to wait until after the inquest to-day. Meg will herself be there.”

“I hear that the drowning of the idiot child is laid to Meg,” said the doctor.

“The suspicion is not one that much surprises me,” said Crispin. “That which is called the charitable world is never at a loss for any imputation, where the imputation may be safely flung. I confess I do not see how this could be improved on. I *know* that it is false; but just now it is the best for her the lie should live.”

The morning wore on; the inquest was set for twelve o'clock. A very respectable jury had been got together; but the general feeling was, that to take so many very respectable men from their trades, in such

a matter, was pushing a formality rather far.

The child, it was benevolently suggested, had not died a day too soon. It was an object "mercifully removed;" for the report that it had met its death unfairly was not very widely believed. This arose from no feeling that there had not been foul play somewhere; but the charitable could not quite agree whom they should suspect.

It was hard to think who could have had the heart to put away Meg's Jim.

Crispin had been out all the morning, and had been up at Meg's ever since he parted from the doctor; and Mona had been left at the Parsonage alone.

An inquest at St. Hilda's, where there was such little matter for such inquiries, was a thing which so rarely occurred, that, when one did happen to be possible, a good many went to see and hear.

Mona had made up her mind to go. Crispin, indeed, had promised to return and take her; but as it was getting late and

he did not return, she determined to start without him.

She was dressed, and had her hand upon the door, when she heard a knock outside.

Mona opened it herself, for there was still no servant kept, much as Mr. Lyle had wanted, himself, to bear the expense, only Crispin would not hear of it at all,—and there stood Mr. Lyle.

“You are going out, Miss Ken, I will not keep you. I only came to see if your brother was going to the inquest.”

“I thought Crispin would have been here before now, Mr. Lyle, he had promised to take me; I am going there myself, and thought I would not wait any longer for him.”

“I am glad to have seen you, Miss Ken, even for a minute, for I do not know when the opportunity may occur again. I leave for London to-morrow, and the session is likely to be a long one. I shall leave Miss Strake in charge, and I should have called,
Miss

Miss Ken, this afternoon, to ask *if, as your guardian*, I could serve you."

Mr. Lyle, as he said those words, "as your guardian," had entered the house, and had taken a seat beside her.

Mona thanked him, and she felt that she had thanked him awkwardly; for she could not conceal from herself that some of his old influence had come back upon her, when he had talked in the tone which he had chosen, of going.

A word — and it did not need a word — a look from her, and Mr. Lyle would cease, she knew, to think about the session. A look on him would not have been at all thrown away, although it was not his fashion to look up.

She would have given a great deal to have been rid of him just then; she could not find the word to tell him to go, and she listened if she could hear Crispin coming. But as all was still without, she tried to change the subject.

"You have heard the rumour, Mr Lyle, that little Jim did not come fairly

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by his death? There is a great deal of suspicion, Mr. Lyle, for a charitable world."

Mr. Lyle smiled. It was one of those smiles that Mona did not understand, and could not bear. Mr. Lyle himself was what is called "a deeply religious man," and for that sort of thing he did not overdo the part before the world.

"I do not like to hear, Miss Ken, more than is possible of what suspicion may have to say; but I confess, from the little I have heard, this rumour does not seem below inquiry."

"Then you suspect this woman of——"

"I—pardon me, Miss Ken, I suspect nothing. I have very unwillingly heard a rumour, nothing more. It would be premature to anticipate that which it is the business of this inquest to discover. We may sometimes suspect a crime, Miss Ken, where we can only see an influence for good, to which we abandon ourselves, whilst yet we perhaps rather shrink back from its power. Society is so constituted
that

that this will always be successful. The religious world, perhaps, is the most open to be suspicious. That world believes the worst to be the best, for a reason no better than would lead it in a moment to cast its faith aside, and to suspect the best. However high we may stand in the good opinion of the world, we should all stand prepared for this. We none of us can tell, Miss Ken, what trifle, what inconsiderable suspicion, may serve to accuse us of a crime."

Mona hardly knew what this could mean. In much that he had said, Mr. Lyle had imaged out himself. His was an influence from which at any time she shrunk ; never more, perhaps, than then. But she felt that, whatever crime might ever so be laid to him, she never could believe it true.

He sat on there, and she got up to go and see if Crispin was coming.

"Miss Ken !"

It *was* he who was calling her back now. There was no influence, no unreal mocking sound ringing in her ears ; and she sickened

sickened at the thought of the word that had so haunted her. There was no fancy ; it was *his* voice, and yet it was quite what it should have been. There was no familiarity ; it was “ Miss Ken ;” as best be-seemed her guardian. It was not “ Mona,” but she came back — back to her chair beside him.

“ Miss Ken, I need hardly apologize for an allusion to your father’s dying wish. It was his last. Your brother has spoken to me on the subject. Before I left for London I thought that I should like to speak with you. He tells me that your marriage with Mr. Wycherley is fixed for the coming spring. I do not, Miss Ken, wish in this matter to act harshly, or even to appear to do so ; but what your excellent father forbade I cannot sanction. You see I have no power to do differently, even should my interference bear a hard construction. Mr. Wycherley has nothing — perhaps the least important thing to be considered ; but I fear that there are symptoms that he will not live long, though it has been observed,
since

since that woman has been kept away from him, he certainly has mended. A fatal termination to his illness was apprehended by your father, whose feelings towards Mr. Wycherley could not well be warmer than my own. Perhaps your father went a little far in his anxiety to see you safe ; nor would I take advantage of my own position to ask you to give me that which your father, as he died, commanded might not ever be Mr. Wycherley's. Command, Miss Ken,—a dying wish when so declared is nothing less — I ——”

Mona had some time seen what was coming, and she tried, so far as she was able to do anything, to reach the open door — tried, it was only that, for Mr. Lyle was not the man to stay her. It was the old fancy quite that kept her there.

But he certainly had done it very well. He knew exactly how to play his game through the memory of her dead father. She did not hear him out, and moved again away. But she dreaded to hear him ask her back. “ Miss Ken ” still rung in her
her

her ears. She felt he would speak her name, and what she felt, fixed her to the spot.

“Mr Lyle, don’t keep me here — you ——”

“Mr. Lyle, you will account to me for this,” said Crispin Ken, who had entered the room unseen by both, and stood between them.

“This is really one of those mistakes, Mr. Ken, which has occurred before, if I must condescend an explanation.”

“It is useless to deny it, Mr. Lyle, I heard my sister, but a minute since, say you held her here.”

“I did not mean it, Crispin, — it wasn’t exactly that — he did not speak. I don’t know what it was that made me say it.”

“Mona, you are almost a fool. John Wycherley had better much have died than have lived to see you false.”

Mona buried her face in her hands, and then on Crispin’s shoulder.

He had said too much. Mona did not know how to be false.

“Mr.

“Mr. Lyle, this afternoon, after this morning’s very painful work is done, I must insist upon an explanation of this visit to my sister. I heard enough to know that you went beyond your office as her guardian.”

Mr. Lyle, whose position, he conceived, was rather above giving any explanation, bowed to Mona as he passed out, and Mona, as he went, held her brother back.

“What are you going to do with him, Crispin? It is I who am to blame. He was not keeping me, not at least by anything he said. It was only — only — fancy.”

“Mona, if it was, there is an end of all this now. I once thought, but it was for a very little time, that there was something too strong for me to bear in the power of this man. You think so still, but you will not think so much longer. You will see him as he is, and it will be very bad to see; and then you will wonder how an influence so cursed could at all have held you.”

And

And they walked on silently together, to the inquest on Meg's idiot child.

It had come out, as those sort of things will, that it was quite likely there would be something more in this inquiry than St. Hilda's had assisted at of late. So there were very few of those — who did not kill their trades by the sacrifice—who were not there.

The inquiry was opened in the largest parlour of the best inn; and after "viewing" the body in the regular way, the thing began.

The coroner was very civil to Mr. Lyle. The coroner wanted something a good deal, which the interest of Mr. Lyle could do something to get him, but which Mr. Lyle did not in the least mean to get for the coroner.

Mr. Lyle had gone to "view" the body much as he did most things; and had taken back the sheet from the face of the corpse, and quite seemed to feel that the breath had gone out of it for ever.

Meg, who had stolen in without being
seen,

seen, had taken the sheet from his hand, and had asked him what he wanted there. But Mr. Lyle did not even say, as is always said at just such times, "It is better off than we are;" nor did he talk, as it is right to do, of the uncertainty of life, as, perhaps, very few of his own sect, under such considerable inducements, could have helped doing.

But Mr. Lyle was something above being so common a performer; and he quite meant to be prepared, whatever turn the inquiry might take.

Mr. Lyle was, of course, a subject for the offer of a chair. He was accommodated with a cane-bottomed one by the coroner. This was so like the man, "that he should be there," the people said, "not an idiot even could be drowned but what he cared."

Mr. Lyle was what is called "a Liberal," and an "Evangelical;" the "friend of the working classes;" and his life, it was believed, was given up to such things as these,

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The room was crowded ; curiosity was mistaken for sympathy amongst the majority, much as it always is. There were Crispin and Mona, Jack and John Wycherley,—who still got better,—and Meg.

Meg did not sit or stand ; she was crouching away in a corner. No sound escaping through her lips but a low moan ; and she looked up only to fix her eyes on Mr. Lyle, and then start, as though she could not help it, to her feet, and clench her hand ; and then, as if she recollected how small her measure in the world was thought to be, shrink back to her corner to nurse her agony and talk to Jim.

There seemed at first to be very little evidence. A labourer, in the employ of Mr. Lyle, was called ; and he said, “ he had been working in the wood near the race, when he heard the scream of a child, and running up to the water-side, for a little had seen nothing ; but going down a few yards lower he had found Meg up to her middle, just below where the water was getting shoal.”

“ Was

"Was there no one near; no one at all but that woman?" asked Mr. Lyle, with something more than even his usual indifference.

"No one else that I could see, sir," said the witness.

It was impossible not to see that Mr. Lyle was for some cause glad that there had been no one else; but he showed it less than most who might not have cared to show it at all. He could lead you away from what he meant so very well; but it is all written in the records of his "party."

"Was that all you saw?" asked the coroner. "Was there no child, then, in the water?"

"The child was under the water—overhead."

"How under the water?" asked Mr. Lyle, as though he had just then only thought to put the question.

The man looked round the court, as though he would rather not be made to say.

"It

"It is not hard to tell; it is very easily answered," said Mr. Lyle. "Was it kept down by a weed, or——"

"By that woman, as far as I could see," said the man, pointing to where Meg was crouching, still seeming at times to take something to her breast, but never, for anything that might be said or done, lifting her eyes off Mr. Lyle.

"She thinks she has got Jim; look, she thinks she has got the fool," said many people—discerning people—in the room; but this gave way to a murmur, which each one present there took up, as it was heard what the man, who witnessed, said.

"Do you swear that that woman was holding the child down under the water?" said the coroner.

"I can't swear it; but it looked like nothing else," said the man. "I went into the water myself and took the child from the woman's arms, and told her it seemed to be a bad job, and that there would be something to answer for. The child was dead enough."

This

This was all the evidence of that witness, and the doctor was the next one sworn.

He happened to have been strange to the place, and had come some miles to make the *post mortem*. "Death had been caused by suffocation. There was every appearance of death from drowning."

Then the jury went to view the place itself; and the bank seemed so thickly grown with shrubs, that it was not easy to understand how the child could have fallen in through them.

There was not a great deal in this, but it closed the evidence on that side; at least it was so represented to the coroner, who had drawn himself up to make the matter plain to the jury, when Crispin Ken, addressing him, said, that for several reasons it had been thought well not to make any mention of what would be done, and of what other evidence could be offered until the proper time arrived. The proper time, to his thinking, had now arrived. The woman, who was known as Meg, would

would be sworn ; and Crispin, as he looked across at Mr. Lyle, could not stay a shudder as he felt what that man's power over him, even for a very little season, once had been ; and he did not greatly marvel at it now. Mr. Lyle did everything well ; but not so well as to seem affected or unnatural about it ; and as he sat there then, Crispin felt that that man's acting was certainly worth something to any number of " Evangelical " societies. Crispin took Meg up from her corner to be sworn ; and as she shook her hair from off her face, and fixed her eyes on Mr. Lyle, there did not seem to be much madness in her look.

" This woman's name must be something more than this ? " said Mr. Lyle, significantly returning Meg's searching look.

" Of course, of course, " said the coroner, obsequiously.

" Do *you* want to know my name ? " said Meg, who was not to be driven back, as Mr. Lyle had thought, by the skeleton his question brought before her ; and as she spoke,

spoke, she seemed almost to hiss the words at Mr. Lyle.

"That is for the coroner to decide," said Mr. Lyle, who began to see that the skeleton was not the terror it used to be, and that Meg cared nothing now for that for which she cared a great deal not so long ago.

The coroner, who had thought Mr. Lyle wanted the woman's name, had been minded to exercise his authority to get it; but now he thought he saw that Mr. Lyle would rather not be told it; so he kept the power of his office to force out some other point.

The coroner was about to examine Meg herself, when she said, not at all as though she was mad, or ever had been mad, "that she would say what she had to say in her own way;" and she spoke as those there in that room had never heard her speak before.

"I might never have told you here to-day what I shall tell now, if he had only left me Jim. It's a long story, and goes over

over a good many long years; but I can tell it without many words. I was by the race that afternoon when Jim was drowned. He was playing a good way from the water-side when I saw a man coming up towards him. He took Jim by the hand and drew him near the race. Then he took Jim up in his arms as though, perhaps, he was making up his mind to do the bloodiest thing that even he had ever done. He put Jim down to play close by the water-side, and looked all round, and when he thought no one could see, he pushed Jim in."

"Who is he?" asked the coroner, impatiently.

"He! who is he? perhaps it is time that you should know—it was Jim's father did it—that man—Ruy Lyle."

"And," said the coroner, "who are you to come and say so?"

"Who am I? That, too, perhaps, it is time you should know—who am I?—Jim's mother—*that man's wife*."

Meg heeded nothing of the murmurs
that

that rung through the room. It had been a long time coming; but now she did not mean to leave till there was nothing more to tell.

“It’s years ago since we were married, and I don’t look so much like that man’s wife. There was a cause, a cursed cause, no matter what, why, to keep ourselves before the world, we should get money. He came to me and said this money *must* be got. I knew what he meant. I could not cast away the power then that he held over me. There’s no one here but knows what *that* is. I got the money for him—got it to the day, to the hour; and I took away a life to keep him, where the world had put him. I have told it now—I never should if he had left me Jim, if—if——”

But Meg had seen that, in another minute, from her own accusing, she would be no longer at liberty. She gave one look at Mr. Lyle, and broke through the people from the room.

Some tried to follow her as she made
VOL. II. E her

her way through everything towards the race ; but she got a start, and kept it ; and all that those who were the nearest to her heard, was a dull and heavy sound in the water, just above the mill. There was nothing of her to be seen when they came up. For hours did the people search the stream. Meg was not found.

“I do not think,” said the coroner—who hardly knew what to think—“that the evidence of this woman, self-accused of murder, should be received. It was too evidently a mere last resource to fix the guilt upon another.”

This profound comment was the general opinion of all there ; and it was not easy to believe that Mr. Lyle, whose face the while had never changed, and who, before the charge had never even winced, was all or anything that Meg had said.

“I have some reason to think otherwise,” said Crispin Ken very firmly. “I can add something to this matter ;” and Crispin Ken was sworn.

“Can you look me in the face, Mr.
Lyle,

Lyle, and swear that what that woman said was false ? ”

Mr. Lyle never looked anybody in the face.

“ Does this room ask it ? ” said Mr. Lyle, with his best committee air, knowing how he would be answered—and he *was* so answered.

No one in that room, or in any other room, thought Mr. Lyle need clear himself of murder.

“ Then it is only left for me to say,” said Crispin, “ that I saw you push the child into the race.”

The coroner thought it now was time to interfere a little. He had asked himself, whether it was still worth his while to take the part of Ruy Lyle, and he thought, from the buoyancy of such a person, at any rate at present, that it was. Here was quite the most pious man in England—the man upon whose name about a dozen “Evangelical” societies depended—told that he was seen to push an idiot into a stream. Of course he would only come out the better

for it after all. But the coroner thought it looked awkward enough, to need a little helping out just then.

Then Jack was sworn, and said the same.

Jim had been carried by the current, which was strong, down the stream some way, and when Meg had found the body it was under water. But the trees just there were over thick, for Mr. Lyle to see, that any one had watched him.

The coroner was only what there is a general liability to be. He was a fool, and he was nothing more. He wanted to get something out of Mr. Lyle, as anybody might, but he would not in the end have gone with Mr. Lyle, for all that Mr. Lyle could give him.

There was what is called "a sensation" through the room, and every eye was turned on Ruy Lyle. There was no believing what was said from how he looked; and when he stood up and spoke, and every word was clear and strong, nothing could be gathered from his face against him.

He

He denied nothing. He spoke of his character, and of his position before the world, and said "that he should be quite prepared to meet it all, but he did not feel exactly very well just then."

As he spoke the people thought they saw a change upon his face, against which he was struggling to bear up.

"Miss Ken will not have forgotten what I only said this morning — how much it takes to earn regard, how little to create suspicion ;" and the people gathered in that room, after he had spoken, thought so too.

He had gone that morning to see the corpse. He never could have looked unmoved upon his victim ; and all there went against the probability that his could be the hand that did the crime. The religious world would never get over it ; and "Evangelical Protestantism" in the end would have to wind up.

But as Mr. Lyle stood there, the people saw him press his hand upon his left side, and he staggered back and groaned.

Disease had long been in his heart, and

the doctor could not tell, after Mr. Lyle had been carried home, whether the great leader of the religious world would live or die.

The inquest was adjourned — upon the facts there could have been only one verdict then.

Whatever might have been the facts, few who had seen it all, thought any the worse of Mr. Lyle. They did not like to feel, that the power they had given themselves up to, was that of a crime that was ill-contrived; and the influence of Mr. Lyle was strong to the last.

The next day the body of Meg was found in the stream some miles below; but the world beyond had now begun to talk about it. In Parliament, at Court, as well as in the “Evangelical” world, the name of Ruy Lyle was but a synonym for what was great and good.

It was discussed in every paper in the kingdom. “Evangelical” literature got out of it a moral for the closet, and a warning for the tea-table. Here was a man who
had

had been at the head of every great "Evangelical" work, blackened with a common crime by a "High Church clergyman." This was not exactly the language. It was simply the regular thing. No one was or could be safe.

Mr. Lyle was the proprietor of seventeen chapels in good working order. In the House of Commons, at Exeter Hall, he was the representative of "Evangelical Protestantism." He took two copies of every issue of the *Record*. If such men were not safe, it was hard to say at what point safety could be determined. It will never, in this world, be seen that religion takes nothing, and loses nothing by any number of such men as Ruy Lyle; but it is not to be denied, that the religious world takes everything by such.

Religion and the religious world, should by this time know each other perhaps a little better — but they don't.

When it was known how Ruy Lyle was lying, the "Evangelical" world was almost ready to stake its future on what

should come of Mr. Lyle's left side. It will not suffer images, but it does not mind all idols. And everything depended then on whether one man's heart cord snapped or stood.



CHAP. IV.

Ruy Lyle.

PEOPLE are beginning no longer to remember what they once owed to Bloomsbury.

No one expects an interminable allegiance to anything in this world.

The most sanguine ground landlord of a proprietary chapel, who has secured the services of a "morning lecturer," is always looking out to strengthen his bill; but Bloomsbury has been cast aside in a generation.

Some of the crossing-sweepers in its squares have a great deal to say about the change;—and they are nice squares too. The big houses round them look every bit as well as they did in the time of the big
B 5 people;

people ; but the history of Bloomsbury is only another chapter in the history of popular caprice.

It must be the very worst sort of caprice, too, not to like Bloomsbury. There are always preachers in its churches that may be trusted unreservedly, and who are always remarkable whenever there happens to be a severe Protestant crisis ; and there is the advantage of trusting something that in the end will be even better worth while trusting—the Bloomsbury lecturers always get to be bishops.

When the battle of Waterloo was fought, people did not mind saying that they lived in Bloomsbury. But some time after the Peace, speculators found gravel at Craven Hill. You might get a big house in Bloomsbury then if you waited for it, and paid for it. You may have the same big one now without waiting for it, and with nothing like the same sort of sacrifice to pay.

It might be worth while considering what has driven the carriages away, and
brought

brought some of the settlers down from Islington. The more seriously inclined have declared why Bloomsbury has fallen away. There was a rather clever race-horse once, called "Bloomsbury," that won the Derby and a heap of betted money. Of course this might be the sort of retribution that has come upon Bloomsbury after a race. It was rather trifling to give its name to a horse that ran for wagers. This might have done it; but if there be any of that virtue which is apprehended in an "Evangelical," bishop, Bloomsbury has reared up, and listened to enough of that manner of virtue, to wipe out the memory of the horse's stride.

When the Reform Bill was juggled into being, you could get nothing cheap in Bloomsbury; now it is about the only place where you can get a cheap housemaid or a moderate cook. A man in livery will almost stand at your street door for nothing.

The apostles could not get all sorts of men to follow them, nor can their suc-

cessors in expectancy, however they may "discourse," get back the sheep that have strayed up to Princes Gate. But Jasper Lyle knew what the advantages of Bloomsbury were. He lived there when Blucher was shown about town, and he would have lived there now, even after Bloomsbury's last favourite preacher has been yielded up to the maw of "Evangelical" bishop-making.

But "Evangelical" bishop-making was not the same genial thing then that it is now; and was never any concern of Jasper Lyle's. He made an effort and a sacrifice to come to Bloomsbury when all its squares kept carriages, and he lived on there till he died; because, when a rather lesser sort of great people came to the big houses, the rents went down, and Jasper Lyle could live on there without any sacrifice at all.

He was not a great judge of what was going on. He saw—quite in his latter days—hackney coaches stop where carriages used to stand; but the carriages
standing

standing about used often rather tempt him to see, before he had climbed up very high, whether he too could not keep a carriage. He could go to his window afterwards without feeling that his neighbour was going for a drive. So, through all its changes, was Jasper Lyle faithful to the end to Bloomsbury.

He always liked to see his square look nice ; and he used to call going to sit for half an hour on a summer day, under a tree in the middle of the square, “ shutting out the world for a little while.”

But as all the square had keys, and as all the square began to find out how near it was possible to be to the world, and yet to be shut out of it, Mr. Lyle made up his mind that it was not so easy to shut it out in Bloomsbury Square. And quite up to the last he would knock off the little boys that used to hang about the handle of the pump ; and when his breath came slower, and the apothecary held up the temptation of some of the St. John’s Wood air, Mr. Lyle, faithful to his square, said, “ that
when

when it came to that it was quite time to die."

Mr. Lyle had not married early. He was one of those who do not think young men should marry. It was his belief that they should see the world. When he decided that he might take a wife, and not sacrifice his business by caring about one woman in particular, he was forty, and his wife about thirty-five.

It is much to be regretted that it may be said of any one who ever lived in Bloomsbury, with chapel influences not very common, that Jasper Lyle, never within his memory, ever went to church. He had never meant to go. Perhaps his mother had taken him when he was yet quite little ; and God would reckon more of us up at the awakening of the world, if we would only let our mothers oftener lead us—if I may measure every mother by my own.

But to get married, there was no getting over the difficulty of going to church.

The

The other party to the contract objected to any acknowledgment of her, short of this ; so Jasper Lyle, by his own account, spent about twenty minutes such as he never spent again.

Jasper Lyle came by what he had in Mincing Lane, and his wife had married him because it had got wind that a good many of the good things of Mincing Lane had fallen to him.

But as a matter of business it was not successful ; and as any other matter it cannot be at all considered.

Jasper Lyle objected entirely to any one about him going to church or to chapel, or anywhere where God may be worshipped, or even where that worship may be simulated.

Jasper Lyle, it must be remembered, had none of the advantages of the last decade. There were no theatres open on a Sunday in his time ; no one to preach about the sin of great cities over against the orchestra, just where the columbine the night before had chalked her shoes.

So

So Jasper Lyle, who believed nothing in Him to whom we build up churches, never ; went to church, and in Bloomsbury, where the godliness was very great, no one knew it.

Bloomsbury was always religious, and the place to contribute all the most distinguished men for bishops. Amongst the general piety which, with all its vicissitudes of caste and house-rent, has always clung to Bloomsbury, Jasper Lyle was always placed.

They had never had but one child, a boy, and whilst he lived on liquids, he was dedicated to the splendid mysteries of Mincing Lane.

The difficulty of christening was got over very well. Mrs. Lyle wanted the little one called after some good king, or some respectable scriptural person. She was very much inclined to go over the latter field for selection. Jasper Lyle was there but indifferently well at home. So the only child that was ever born to them came to be called Ruy, after the greatest broker

broker anywhere in Mincing Lane. This was a line of greatness that Jasper Lyle could quite understand, and was much more in his way than anything that history, religious or profane, could contribute.

Then came the godfathers and the godmothers, and the going to church again. This difficulty was satisfactorily got over by its being pointed out that Jasper Lyle need not see the bringing of his child to God. He yielded at this point, but he did not at all understand, nor could it be made clear to him, why the child could not wait till he was grown up, as had the Mincing Lane broker after whom he was named. The broker happened to be a Baptist; but it was only on condition that there was to be an end to all going to church after that, that Jasper Lyle would let his little one be carried to the font.

It was the mother whose purpose was not to be set aside. It was the mother who bore up against the oath, and the curse, and the blasphemy with which the honoured one of Mincing Lane took its moralists to witness

witness that there was no God. It was the mother who devoted the little one to God, when the father dedicated it to Mincing Lane; and these mothers, when we miss them from our sides, are chiefly wanted where their love leads on to — to swell the company of angels.

Jasper Lyle saw nothing but what was likely to give his child a cold in christening it, and his orders were that there was no water to be used. Jasper Lyle was a very respectable man, and had never been ill in his life; and when he was a little sick he was not bad enough to be kept away from putting some invoices in salt.

He was asked to come forward for two or three boroughs, on the "liberal" interest, and was what is called "a friend of religious liberty;" and many were the young men who were told by their parents or their guardians, that to do as did Jasper Lyle, was quite the best thing to do in this world.

But during the earlier years of his life, Ruy Lyle was, but to a small extent, sub-
ject

ject to those influences which were so little apprehended by Bloomsbury Square. The wife of Jasper Lyle had married the man she had not loved. It was not the inconvenience of this that she deplored, but the crime that she began to feel. Society did not in any way call it a crime, or it might be that some of the likeliest places would fail to hold the criminals that would be so told off. Jasper would offer up his own to Mincing Lane; his wife would, with her life's love, keep the narrowest of all lanes up before her child; and for five years she did, and then she died.

Jasper Lyle could never quite persuade himself that he had done well in marrying at all. A woman, it seems, should have some sort of attention, and he found this rather interfered with business. So, when his wife died, he sent for his tailor, covered himself with the outward seeming of what he did not feel, and there was an end of it in the most legitimate way.

Jasper Lyle would not have cared to have been left with a child, but that he
wanted

wanted something to leave his money to, and in this light he could even bear sometimes to have it, for a few minutes before it went to bed, upon his knee; and one night, when the little one's bed-time had come, it kneeled up the last thing without any telling, except from the dead, on Jasper's knees, and put its little palms together—"Pray God bless me, papa, and mamma," and then it left off; for all the prayer it ever knew was done, and the broker's boy was taken by its nurse up stairs.

Jasper Lyle, so soon as he could gather himself up, followed, and found his child singing to its nurse a hymn. He went to the bed-side and layed his hand roughly on the baby mouth, and then turned to the woman for an explanation of what had been done downstairs, and of this continuation.

"It was my mistress's order, sir," said the woman; "and this is the first night that Master Ruy ever knowed the words. Mistress was very perticler that they should
be

be said to you first of all when he could say them well."

"You will be good enough to recollect that so long as you remain in this house you are my servant. I'll have no nonsense of this sort put into his head," and Jasper Lyle sat down by his child's side, and gave it something sweet, never to talk or sing like that again.

"Mightn't I say it for mamma?" said the child, making its condition over the sugar.

"There, go to sleep, never say it to any one again;" and as he left he repeated the order to the woman in charge.

"Isn't Master Ruy to learn his prayers at all, then?"

"Not if you should want to keep your place."

"Then I don't want to keep my place, sir, and wouldn't keep it if it was ever so much; this day month you'll please to suit yourself. I aint going to live with a heathen."

Now, there was really something in this aversion. The hireling's fancies about
heathenism

heathenism might even lead to inconvenience. Jasper Lyle, for some reasons which then crossed his mind, would a very great deal rather that the woman stayed. She kept the child out of his sight, and away from where he could ever hear it, except when he happened to want to see it; and then it was brought down for a little while before it went to bed.

Jasper Lyle, in his time, had seen something of the world in Mincing Lane; but it was a great way beyond him to understand, how any one could want to go on that day month, because he would not let his child be taught its prayers. He would have turned out the woman there and then, with her month's hire, but "value received" had been a maxim with him all the days of his life. It might be easy to get a woman who would not care, or even seem to care, whether his child was taught its prayers or not; but it might not be nearly so easy to find, even in Bloomsbury, another who would help him to forget—for about eleven hours and three quarters out

out of twelve—that he had a child at all. So he made a little calculation and offered her another pound to stop.

“Not if you was to double it, sir. I couldn’t stop and see God driven clean out of the house ; something that you won’t like will come of it, although I’m only a nurse that says it, and then you’ll be sorry, when it won’t be any use, that you’ve been and stopped his learning the words that might have been listened to. Nothing good will ever come of it, and I wouldn’t stop if you made it as many guineas.”

Jasper Lyle did not stay to tell the woman what he thought of her, because he felt that he could not compass what she meant. She had thrown away a pound a year—a pound a year was not to be thrown away when money was at eight per cent. He quite meant that that child some day should be talked about in Mincing Lane. He was going to leave his boy all his money that it might be he should make ; and as he felt how his name would be handed down, he turned to the nurse, and told her with a threat, that she

she had better mind him. A serving-woman who could voluntarily leave Bloomsbury Square, was well enough out of such a house as his.

Ruy Lyle was in the end put into fresh hands — into the hands of a woman who made no sort of objection about not teaching him his prayers. So Jasper Lyle was satisfied that he was suited, and his little one forgot his little prayer, and how to pray the words his mother left him.

Ruy Lyle had reached the age of twelve without seeing a great deal of his father. Whatever he knew he learnt at home, and there was something in that which he might as well not have learnt.

Jasper Lyle kept him purposely away from others of his own age, and even when Ruy was much younger, he was never let to go to tea with others who were sent into the square for air.

At fourteen it was just two years harder to keep him at home ; not that Ruy Lyle cared for those of his own years, but he cared a good deal for those who were nearer men.

At

At fifteen he looked the boy no longer ; perhaps that change in his nurse, or something like it, was beginning to tell. His father kept him in as much as he well could, and as much as fathers do, who keep their sons out of the world, because they do not find the sins of the world to be cheap toys. Not that Jasper Lyle cared what his son might do, that in any moral way was wrong ; but he did not want his son to go out and owe people money, for he would have to pay it.

But Ruy Lyle had soon begun to find that he might go anywhere—whether his father liked it or not—with such a face as his ; and there was that about him, as he threw the seeming of the boy aside, which was an influence—in power like a drug—over every one, with whom he came in contact.

If his face was perfectly chiselled, it was perhaps from its expression that men turned to look at it again, and that women came to think so much of getting a crayon

of it, to face the profile of some saint in their albums.

Jasper Lyle heard of this, and saw how late his son came home at night ; and that often he did not even come till it was morning. This was about the crisis that the father thought it might be time for business.

Ruy said nothing when the thing was put before him, and every morning went to Mincing Lane ; but he managed, without saying any more, to go beyond his father every night.

Boy as Ruy Lyle then was in years, every woman it seemed worth his while to look on was, for his own selected time, his toy. He managed better than his father ever had, to get where he had a mind to go. He could call in certain religious aids ; and with some women he found there was no help for it, and that he must talk religion.

It was nothing very hard ; it was soon nothing hard at all. You may talk religion as you may preach it. It is not the fourth commandment with everybody that shuts
up

up theatres' on the Sunday. We must not render wholly to the law of Sinai, what is in a measure due to the Lord Chamberlain.

Ruy Lyle did talk religion as it is sometimes preached, to get the women round him. His father had never thought it worth his while to talk it at all, for the sake of any woman.

Jasper Lyle could see that his son was a good deal thought of; but he would rather it had been in Mincing Lane, than where it was; and Ruy Lyle the while was out nearly the whole of every night; and it was only when he came to owe so much, and that what he owed was shown to his own father, that Jasper knew the life his son was leading.

It was one evening that the bill was sent. Ruy saw what was coming; but he had always cared for his father so little, and now so much the less, that he asked himself rather often, of late, if it was fair to believe that he cared for him at all.

“Don't go away, Ruy; I want to have

a word with you. Do you know what this cursed long thing is?" said Jasper, holding up the long credit; and when he asked this of his son, he looked as Ruy even could not remember to have seen him look before. "Do you think I'll pay for what these women order?"

Ruy smiled; and it was then no common smile, nothing like to what it would be, but still too much for Jasper Lyle.

Jasper Lyle had called, not in any very measured way, for a curse upon his son for running up that bill. It was the first time that son could remember to have ever heard his father take into his lips God's name, and he told him so.

"I did not ask you to pay for them; it is just as you please; but perhaps you'd better, or it may be talked about, and that's bad for credit, isn't it?"

This was intended to mean, that critical people in Mincing Lane might say, that Jasper Lyle did not pay whatever his son owed, because he had not got the money to pay it with; and this, as represented,
might

might affect his credit. He did not at all see that Ruy had gone as far as the jeweller would let him, and that as soon as this was paid, Ruy meant to do a great deal more of such business with the jeweller again.

“You’ll make a great man,” said Jasper, “if you live. You will just do to take in the world.” Jasper Lyle believed himself quite a great man already.

It was only a very little that Ruy cared for Mincing Lane. He liked a different sort of speculation; and at eighteen there was not a race meeting in the kingdom, where there was any betting doing, on which he did not make a book.

There is not so much difference as some people affect to believe, between the money article and the record of the betting at “the corner;” and it is not wholly unlikely that Tattersall’s, of the two, is the *venue* of the cleanest things. But the man who stakes anything on a fall in the funds, is described, in what is thought to be respectable slang, as “an operator for a fall;” and no one thinks that what he has done

is not legitimate. A man who lays against a horse may come — out of the same mouths — to be only called a “leg;” and very few indeed would think of calling him respectable.

Jasper Lyle was one of these. But before he came to hear of how his son was getting on, he was taken away from Mincing Lane. It was Mincing Lane that missed him, and it was nothing else that did.

Jasper Lyle expected nothing after Mincing Lane. The only eternity he had faith in, was one where there would be nothing else but sugar canes, and the blacks upon the property at work for nothing.

He was one day wondering if Ruy had it in him to make money and hold it, when he fancied he felt a hot pain on his tongue. He sucked the sweet things of the Lane, but the hot pains multiplied, and for weeks they never left him, till one day he died hungered to death of cancer on the tongue.

Ruy

Ruy, when he had buried his father, was never seen again in Mincing Lane ; and no man ever made a heavier book than he.

He lost a great deal the first year, but then he had a great deal to lose, and "the ring" were so anxious to have a little more yet out of him, that they made the losing very pleasant.

The influence of Ruy Lyle, when he was about twenty-one, was such that to make an effort to describe it would be written down exaggeration. But it may be said that it was felt by all alike, by the tainted, by the pure, by the simple, by the suspicious, by the religious world, and by the world where there is even some religion. It was an influence which the worldling acknowledged, and to which the man who hated all the world confessed.

Years went on, and this influence of Ruy Lyle still held its own, and grew. He was not at all the man to show, from any awkward outward symptoms, that any of the universal homage reached him. He
F 4 felt

felt it, without showing that he recognized it, and without the affectation of showing he despised it. He kept everything that came to him when he was younger, everything but the money made over so many years in Mincing Lane. And the world gave him credit for being what he was not, and for having what he had not — which was certainly convenient. If he was sometimes at the opera, he was always at church. If he never missed the Ascot cup, he had never missed the meetings in the Strand, of the May before.

Middle-aged people could not understand why they were following so young a man. It was not to be told what drew the world about him, and what held it there.

When it was known that Ruy Lyle had become a preacher, the world that was not called religious, was sorely tried that he altogether belonged to the religious world.

Ruy Lyle had found, that this would pay him better than anything else that he
could

could do. He sent round the plate, and laid out the collections at good “prices.”

But Ruy Lyle brought to the platform nothing that was loud or vulgar. He was not one of the popular preachers who infest the minor theatres on a Sunday. He travelled over England, doing a good business, until one afternoon he came to a large Hall to preach, somewhere in the western counties.

Ruy Lyle had laid the odds against the winner of the two thousand guineas, so to get what he could of his money back, it was very necessary that he should make his congregation pay, and he did ; and just as he was leaving the Hall a note was put into his hands.

Mr. Phinehas Aird presents his compliments to the Rev. Ruy Lyle, and requests the honour of his company during his stay at——.”

Now Phinehas Aird had never been known to ask any one to stay with him ever in his life before ; but for reasons, other than that it was worth while going,

Mr. Aird was very rich ; and Ruy Lyle, if he spoke hopefully to the poor when he preached, and conventionally declared their prospects to be much the best, always dined with the rich when he could.

Mr. Aird was a widower, and knew no one beyond his daughter in the world ; and he had made it his business to know no one. He lived with this daughter, a Mrs. Dryden, a widow.

At the house of Phinehas Aird, Ruy Lyle stayed pleasantly enough a month ; and, as it was at Mrs. Dryden's wish that he had been asked to come, it was at her wish he stayed.

From the very first, the influence of Ruy Lyle had grown into her being. However much he had drawn the world towards him, with Helen Dryden his was a power that she could not understand, that she could not even see put out, but that she could not control. If he had learnt to play a part, as few have had the opportunity to play it, he was not so clumsy as to show it was a part ; and Ruy Lyle
could

could look the world full in the face then.

But he did not hold with this woman, as, to suit his fancy, he had with many others. He knew from the moment that he saw her face amongst the others in the Hall, eager to catch up every word he said, that she might be his, and all that she had, whenever he wished it.

Helen Dryden was no longer well-looking, and no longer young. Ruy Lyle was the first man Phinehas Aird had ever let into his house; for though he had given up his life to suspecting his own kind, Ruy Lyle was a great deal more than he could compass.

Ruy Lyle had stayed the month, and then Helen Dryden asked him to stay out another. It was just what he thought might be convenient, and what he thought would happen; and when a little later he asked her to become his wife, Helen Dryden felt it would not have been life without him; and she was his. He might
F 6
tire

tire of the tie, but he did not think that he would sicken of the settlement.

So the house of Phinehas Aird became his home. But he never saw anything of the son that Helen had ; he would not let her see the boy ; and her son did not even know that his mother had married. Helen saw what his wish had been, and could not resist it, before perhaps it had been his wish ; and she had not even seen her son for years before, as Phinehas Aird would not let her have the child about him. Nor did Helen feel any shame when Ruy Lyle's power made her keep away her son, although then, he did not know where that son was. He made her do it, though she could not recollect one spoken word of his that urged her. And Ruy Lyle before the world still preached, and without it laid the odds.

CHAP. V.

Bolingbroke.

UY LYLE had some time been quite the leading man of the “Evangelical Protestants.”

The “Evangelical Protestants,” who have made some awkward mistakes through the simplicity of their attachments, thought they had got the right man to themselves at last.

Nor was it much before they really wanted him. They had had their trials. Some of their very best had been driven away in the Newgate van. They wanted something, that under no temptation, could ever get into such a strait—that could never be so driven away—and it was after this sort that they put Ruy Lyle into the highest

highest place, just about the time he was "getting on," at very long odds, to "Mrs. Taft" for the Cæsarewitch.

It is quite likely that a man, however serious, may make a very good leader indeed, of what is called "Evangelical Protestantism," who makes a book on an autumn handicap. But then "Evangelical Protestantism," which we are desired to believe is a most serious thing, does not at all think so.

"Evangelical Protestantism" will think that this is ill meant against it here, and will assume to believe that some interference with its sacred idols is intended, when it is deferentially suggested, that it lays hands rather suddenly on a good many young men.

And its platform, at the very best, is undeniably a mixed one. Nonconformity and "Evangelicalism" borrow one the other's pulpit, and pretty nearly everything is made to centre in how its ministers can talk.

It is not at all that "Evangelicalism,"
which

which is the faith, or the luxury of many who hold it with a good intention, is necessarily to be under suspicion, because it gives employment to the Ruy Lyles, who speculate on the credulity of the "religious world." But it is as clear that its Ruy Lyles would not elsewhere get employed.

Here was "Evangelical Protestantism" setting up a man who thought quite as much—or it might be more—about how horses ran, as he did how the souls that trusted in him could be saved.

It has been ascertained, as nearly as it can be, that a man's soul need not be the worse off, because he does not happen to see the doom of the world, written on the rail in the front of the ring at Epsom. But "Evangelicalism" has declared against the race-course, has monopolised the month of May to do the business, and just then, in its eagerness to get the latest talker on its side, had carried to its platform a man, who lived by a race horse's stride.

The "religious world," in an "Evangelical"

cal" form, does not very well like to be suspected of hypocrisy; and even in its book-world sets up a censor from schism, to let the suspicion have as little chance as may be.

Mr. Lyle, it was observed, was always in the chair when he was wanted. It did not occur to the world that set him there, that the man who could talk so very well, and so very long, against the lusts of the flesh, could think so much of what a two-year old could do on a tan gallop.

What a two-year old may do on a tan gallop would seem to be, at the worst, a moderate evil; but then "Evangelicalism," which sees harm in everything, would not think well of the performance, and trace any number of crimes from such a beginning.

Ruy Lyle was always in the Strand in the month of May, but then he was also always at the Derby. And the only Protestantism which is held to be "safe," was believed to be bound up on what this man,
who

who so equalised his May arrangements, did or did not do.

Mr. Lyle was believed, by a great class of people, to be just then the chief obstacle in the country to Anti-Christ. But he was not known to be the chief backer of Bolingbroke for the Derby.

Ruy Lyle had been married some eight years, and all those years through he had lived—with very tolerable success—a lie.

He had been the preacher of the day, and to be the preacher of that day was not a common thing, for there was great competition.

He had gone about with infinite simplicity of method, giving away bibles, and betting against horses. But he was perfectly well made up. He did not look at all like what he was. He wrote tracts, that got into any number of editions, against the race-course. He invited young men to come to listen to the account he had arrived at, with sorrowful certainty, of the end of the betting man. And the young men, under
such

such inducements, came in crowds, and heard the fearful news.

Nor, perhaps, was it strange that he was not transparent to the world ; for his wife, even, did not see what was in him. His power over her the rather grew than fell away. He would never let her see her son. She heard him say that he was going to preach from a winning-post, from the ground of the evil as he put it, about what a cursed thing it was to race one horse against another. And when he came back, he would talk of the effect of his words, even while the bell was ringing, and would say that, "he had not spoken to deaf ears even round the saddling paddock."

When she looked on him, as though she could not set too great a price on the gift that had been given her, she well believed it. He had been everything that any man could be through those eight years. The leading influence in the religious world, whatever it might be, was always at her side. It was hers. He was her very own. And Ruy Lyle, it seems to be sufficiently

sufficiently clear, was a great actor all that while. He never let the "Evangelical" world see, that he had been laying unadvisedly two to one against the winner.

They had had one child born to them ; it was a fool. Helen felt that any harder man than he might very well have hated it. But he was always kind. He always had a smile for her, and it was a smile of which all womankind did not think a little. She did not believe the world had ever held another such a man.

If, when he seemed to have stayed long away, she came to his knees, as she often did, and told him that she could not bear that he should leave her sight, he would smile on her, and then look very grave, and fetch out his Bible, and tell her he needs must be about his Master's business ; whilst he was wondering the while how such and such a horse should have broken down so badly.

He was before all actors in this sort of way. The "religious world" could only wonder how long, for their advantage, so good
good

good a man would be likely to last, and retain all his power; and Phineas Aird, who took a money view of the matter, could never, in the least, tell how his luck brought him such a son-in-law.

The Derby of 1850 had a good deal occupied the attention of the then leader of the "Evangelical" platform.

All through the winter months, when his last tract against the ingenuity of the temptation of a running horse to a human being, was in about its twentieth thousand, Ruy Lyle was making up his book on "Bolingbroke."

He had made good books on Surplice and the Dutchman, and stood to win on Bolingbroke and Pitsford.

It will not have been forgotten by those who were led into the *furor*, and so dropped their money, that Bolingbroke was made as good a favourite as anything before the day, and that only four to one was laid against him when he started. It is not often, even when there seems a frenzy to take the odds against a horse, that there
is

is one for which there is so general a liking as there was that spring for Bolingbroke. Indeed, with Robinson "up," it was thought he could not lose.

Now, if Ruy Lyle ever meant to do any thing, he meant to go to that "Derby." But it was rather awkward that he should be called up by a party, that was almost unanimous, to take the chair at Exeter Hall on that very morning.

The "Protestant" platform had made its arrangements, independently of the Epsom Derby; and it was but little likely it would think of the grievous scourge that was going to settle on the Surrey hills; and Mr. Lyle found that he would have no help for it, but that he must take the chair about eleven o'clock.

The time for the affair in the Strand was rather critical; but as it was not to be got over, and as the meeting was a very wordy one, and did a great deal for Protestantism generally, Mr. Lyle had from the chair to announce his intention of going to the "Derby."

He

He was going there himself, with many quires of striking tracts, to rebuke the evil on the spot.

When it was actually understood that Ruy Lyle was likely, that afternoon, to be hustled, perhaps by a living jockey, or something worse, if it were possible, "Evangelical Protestantism" could do nothing better than hope, in a devout sort of way, that he might be permitted to come back safely.

It was agreed that he was to meet them elsewhere that evening, and tell them something of his perils, over his tea; and the meeting was concluded by a special prayer against the Derby. Under the circumstances, Mr. Lyle got a great deal into a very little; but then it was very strong, and the composer of the inspiration and denunciation, went out into a corner of the Strand to find that Bolingbroke was very firm, and that "Clincher," the then first favourite, stood with only one point in the betting less against him.

It was Voltigeur's memorable year, and
Lord

Lord Zetland's home-trained horse was at 16 to 1, not very greatly fancied by the ring.

Mr. Lyle, who believed the race to be as good as over, did not fancy him at all, and public enthusiasm lay, perhaps, chiefly in the direction of Bolingbroke and Clincher.

When Mr. Lyle reached Epsom Downs, Bolingbroke was in reality as good a favourite as anything on the card. Robinson, one of the most accomplished horsemen of that, or any other day, reappeared in the saddle, after a long illness, and it was now known was to ride him.

When Mr. Lyle was within the ring, he took the odds all round, wherever they were offered against the horse, and as eagerly he laid them against Voltigeur.

Ruy Lyle did not for any time forget, that the Protestant platform had some considerable concern in what he did that day.

He was there, it was believed, chiefly to tell the people what would become of jockeys at the end of the world; and to
carry

carry out his purpose properly, it was no use sending them to any place but one.

Ruy Lyle was no stranger to this sort of thing; and his make-up inside the ring was such, that even those who knew him best could not have recognised him.

He was told that the best thing he could do was to lay against Voltigeur; and, as he was of this way of thinking himself, he laid against the horse any number of times, to any number of thousands. He could only lose very badly if Voltigeur won; and then he would lose everything he had to lose; and so it was he stood upon that Derby when the ring broke up.

What he had to do for the platform that he represented must be done now; and casting his disguise aside at the proper moment, he stood outside the judge's box. When he had addressed the crowd against the evil, that brought so many there that day, and given them some surprisingly horrible illustrations of what might be their end, he distributed his tracts in thousands.

Ruy

Ruy Lyle had managed to get a ticket for the paddock, which he had kept in his pocket at the bottom of the tracts; and as soon as he could make up his disguise again, he went to see the horses saddled.

Bolingbroke looked as fit as his trainer could make him, so at least his friends believed; and it was some corroboration of their confidence to be told that the stable were "on" him to a man.

Some, who had seen these good things come very badly to grief, thought he looked "a little over-done," and that he would never get up the hill; but five to one was the highest point, that those who would back their opinion, would offer against him; and every time that that price was offered, Ruy Lyle took it.

"He'll distance the field," he said, as much to himself as his belief would let him, as he closed his book.

"He'll never live the hill; he's never meant to live it," said one, who was well known upon the turf, who had just been taking stock of Voltigeur, as that horse was

being led about in another paddock near. "I'll lay you he's one of the first beaten."

Ruy Lyle's disguise had never been seen through yet. He had carried it on for years without suspicion; and it was tolerably well known that whatever horse he liked he stood out on.

"What will you back?" said Ruy, indifferently.

"Oh anything—*Voltigeur*."

"Sixteen to one in thousands?" asked Mr. Lyle.

"As many times as you please."

As they booked the bet, Mr. Lyle inadvertently pulled out a tract from his pocket. The taker of the odds stepped forward to pick it up.

"Oh, don't trouble yourself, thank you," said Ruy, "it's only one of those — tracts with which a part of the Protestant public thinks it can put down racing."

"It's wonderful where the fools come from who read them; but I see that this one is by that king of maw-worms, Ruy Lyle."

Lyle. They'll find that canting fellow out some day, as they have a good many others lately; but it won't be till he's lined his pockets by his dupes."

"Voltigeur's not fit to run for a borough stake," said Mr. Lyle, staying, as soon as the opportunity permitted him, the taker of the odds from finishing his portrait of the then leader of a great part of the Protestant platform. "He's too big—like all these home-trained horses, and it very well mayn't be worth his jockey's while to win."

Ruy Lyle spoke just as a man would speak whose chief "trade" is charity.

"What," he continued, "did Job Marson ever do?"

"I like his riding better than any other man's I ever saw. There isn't eight stone seven here to-day with such a seat, with such tact and power, or with such a rare head at a finish as Job Marson. I'd back him, if I didn't like the horse. I saw him when he first came into his riding, win the Goodwood Cup with Charles XII.; and

his landing of Nutwith, for the St. Leger, a head in front of Frank Butler and Cotherstone, was about the most brilliant thing I ever saw. He's quite the most superb horseman here to-day."

And he who said it then was not very wrong. Ruy Lyle was laying all he dared against a jockey, who, if a horse could win, would win, just as a horse should, in his accomplished hands.

Job Marson's handling, even of a "brute," no matter whether at a long rally or at a close finish, has never been surpassed; and his exquisite "set to" on Teddington, for the Ascot Cup, and on the same horse for the cup at Doncaster, where he fairly outrode Flatman, from the very first, are "bits" that can never be forgotten.

Ruy Lyle and his new-found companion made their way into the paddock, where Voltigeur was holding a levee by himself, and they walked up to the horse's side.

General opinion was that the horse looked perhaps a little over big; but Job Marson,

Marson, who looked as quietly confident as he always did when he meant to win, said "that he would come in with him that afternoon alone."

Ruy Lyle might have "got out" then; but as he looked after the brown-black as it walked away, destined to be handed down in the gallery of Derby winners, he felt he would not give up to a growing fancy for the horse, and he closed his book and stood to win a hundred thousand on Bolingbroke, and to lose his all on Voltigeur.

He had been a great many years at it, and was not very often wrong; and, perhaps, he felt just then rather against his own inclination that it was hardly safe, and he almost had a mind to hedge a little.

As he moved slowly round the paddock, the wind that there was blew his own tracts, which he had some time before scattered about amongst the people, into his own face.

"I have always done well enough," he said, so that no one else could hear it,

“but I think I shall do better than I have ever done before, to-day.”

A hundred thousand, and the credit of those things which the wind blew into his face, was what he was thinking of to himself, as he crumpled up the tracts and threw them from him.

The ring stood very heavily against Voltigeur; but the “gentlemen,” with very few exceptions, were eager enough to get the sixteen points offered against him, any number of times.

Ruy Lyle had “layed” up to the last, until the course was cleared, against the Richmond horse; and when the jockeys mounted, were seen following one another from the paddock, Ruy Lyle turned into one of the stands, where he could see the race all through, from the start to the finish.

It was just one of those Derbys when anything might win. There was nothing known to be so good as to be backed against the field.

Clincher was first favourite, as much as
anything

anything because Frank Butler rode him; the fancy that no one could ride like Butler just then getting into some force. Frank Butler, at his best, and he was a long time at his best, and had a great deal more than his share of the surest mounts, was a very fine horseman; but he could never "finish" like Job Marson, or Buckle, or Chiffney.

The public money, layed out on Bolingbroke, showed tolerably clearly that the fondness for the horse was pretty general; and Robinson's reappearance in the saddle lent something to confirm the confidence that was felt in him.

Ruy Lyle, as he took his seat, and watched the horses canter by, before they were led to the post, was nearly able to believe that the Derby was as good as over. He stood alone to win on Bolingbroke and Pitsford,—the only horse in his book that could be so very bad a one to him would be Voltigeur.

Voltigeur did not look nearly so big when he moved, as some thought he had

when he stood in his sheets in the Baron's field; but the best he could do, it was Mr. Lyle's belief, would be not to "whip in."

The last five minutes before the Derby is run off, is worse than waiting for the man to die, that you believe will leave you money. There is nothing quite like it in the world besides. Every one has gathered there to see what will be done in about three minutes of time. Parliament has decided not to sit, so that it may share in seeing the issue.

Nothing ever bears so much as those three minutes after three on the last Wednesday in May. A nation never comes, all together, with its worst and its best, for any other thing. Nor was it any libel on "Evangelical Protestantism" that Ruy Lyle, or any other of its professors, should be there. The most serious Protestant platform may learn something that it well may learn, by much of that which obtains upon the turf. Thousands there change hands without any security at all; and
amongst

amongst some of the most likely of that platform's preachers, thousands do not always change hands, where it is believed that there has been the very best security.

No one comes there upon those downs to think that he will lose ; or there are those who could never sit and hear that bell begin to ring. The young must become old, and the youngest grey, as he searches for *his* horse, as Tattenham Corner is well passed. It is a bit of life that you will not see anywhere upon this earth, but on those downs, upon that day. To hear those throats gurgling up the name that *ought* to win ; to see those eyes fixed on the horse that *must* not lose.

And all that money will change hands without one law that can insure its changing. It is nothing but a moral obligation. A man need only do what he may like to do ; and what would a moral obligation do, in many other places, where there are covenants, and bonds, and other things, after which it is believed a man may sometimes trust his fellow ?

There are not so many other places where honour stands a chance without security, or sometimes even with it. The odds are given and taken, and there are thousands on the issue; and though that issue rests on nothing but a horse's legs, there is better faith in settling at "the corner," than with many of the more professed religious kind, who have patented a way to heaven.

The Derby is everybody's question. It is the question of the peer and the parvenu; of the tradesman and the tramp. It is a question which has "ruled" throughout a year, told off to what has been, whilst the minute hand goes round three times. It is a question that the heir may ask himself, if the fetlock of the favourite is false; and it is a question that the frailty beside him there, shall ask when the horse runs soft, and leaves her on the world. But it is a question that no one seems to dare to ask until the race is won—with any other thought less light, the Carnival on Epsom downs would be a hell.

The

The minute had come when in that Surrey air men found it getting hard to breathe.

Mr. Lyle took off his hat and wiped his brow. He had very often preached with remarkable effect against the Derby; but he could adapt himself to circumstances, and Bolingbroke was now his only text.

He put his glass to his eye with a marvellously steady hand, as the horses stood together for the start.

They got away as one: Deicoon and Penang soon showing with a strong lead in front. There was no change that mattered much, as they rose the hill; and as they swept round, a shout went up that Bolingbroke was out of the race. And so he was—the first beaten; the last that could win upon that day.

But it was difficult to see it in the face of Mr. Lyle. He had turned his glass on Pitsford; and that horse, as they came round the corner, looked as likely as anything.

And now the roar gathered and grew, as
c 6 the

the horses tore up the straight. Clincher was leading, running too, it seemed, within himself; and the people began to shout that the favourite was winning.

There was a brown black horse stealing up, and looking as though he might yet steal up more. Clincher led at the Stand; but Mr. Lyle was searching out terribly the brown black horse that was creeping up. He had laid sixteen to one to a good many thousand pounds against that horse. It was a match, just for an instant, between Pitsford and Voltigeur; and Clincher died away at each stride.

Job Marson was "riding" his horse, and,

"Though every eye is on him, and a wild roar rends the air,
He sits not more calm and quiet in his Middleham arm-chair."

Voltigeur, superbly handled by Job Marson, stalled off Pitsford's challenge, and won as he liked.

Since the horses had first come in sight at the corner, Ruy Lyle had never taken
his

his eyes off Voltigeur ; and only for an instant, when his own tracts, lifted by the wind, had got between him and the horse, did he ever turn to watch another.

“ A very true run race,” observed a gentleman, who was very comfortable as Voltigeur’s number went up ; but Ruy Lyle, to whom this was addressed, heard nothing then, as he moved down the course, and went up the far-off downs, where there was no one near.

It was difficult to see, as he passed by the mountebank, and the man who tried your lungs for a penny, that it had not been a “ true run race ” to Ruy Lyle.

He had so long performed in public ; he had so long been there what he was not, that there was something of a struggle then within him.

When at last he stopped and looked up, there was but little to show to what purpose he had come. He had lost over that race everything he had to lose. Sinners even would be prepared to settle, and the leader of “ Evangelical Protestantism,” though
he

he was that leader in disguise, must pay somehow what he owed, or there might be questions asked about him; and that "somehow" he rather suddenly thought he saw the way to.

It was a devilish way that opened up before him that May afternoon, and he stayed for a little while to think over it, and put it into decent form; for he liked to do what might be even devilish, decently; and then he threw off his disguise, and walked back, and talked seriously before the winning-chair to those who had that day lost and won.

And no one ever saw him look his fellows in the face again.

Ruy Lyle reached London when the night was young, and he never stopped till he came to a house that stood in a little street leading up out of the Strand.

He raised the knocker, for he had come to take his leave of one who lived there; but he did not beat it back. It was not often that he did not dare do anything, but the night of that day was not as the
nights

nights of other days had ever been to him ; and he hurried down the street again.

A woman touched his hand, as a lamp's light fell upon his face, and his own name was on her lips. It was not because he saw the sign of his own sin before him, that he moved away, but he had lost everything that day, and he felt that then he was a broken man. He had not dared to meet and tell her they must part, and what he was, so he had turned back, when he had even stood before the door. Nor was Ruy Lyle afraid that she would tell what he was to the world, on which he was so great a fraud. She was better a great way than he was, and he knew it. She would never speak the word that would point the finger of contempt at him, and he then dared not stay to tell her they must part, for he feared that she should know the lie he was. She might get over it as best she could, and he turned, and left another standing in the streets, to feel that it was even something to be cast aside by him.

Where

Where he next stopped was in another quarter of the town. He opened the door of a house that formed one of a long street, and walked in and stood within a room, where many leading members of the platform he patronised, were sitting round a table drinking tea.

These gentlemen, as they had agreed they would, had met together there to hear from Mr. Lyle what he had done on Epsom downs, and to what redeeming purpose he had scattered his tracts amongst the people.

“It was a horrible sight, and in the last degree a fearful ordeal for men’s souls to pass; there must have been three hundred thousand there. It is very grievous to see a nation running after these carnal things. I have every humble hope that that tract has touched the evil. I am but an instrument, my good friends, I am but an instrument; it is not for us always to succeed.”

“Then,” said one of the gentlemen,
“you

“you think, Mr. Lyle, the trial to yourself was not without success, and that some of these poor creatures’ souls were won.”

“Voltigeur won——”

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Lyle, I did not catch the name; did you mention any particular case you rescued?”

“A brown black horse, about fifteen hands three, rather light in the middle; but you don’t suppose I saw the winner?”

It would have been too much to have supposed it; and when Mr. Lyle had finished his tea, another tract was extemporised for delivery at Ascot.

And then, before that holy leaven turned into the streets to meet the outer world, they gathered round the table; and Mr. Lyle, who had never acted better than he did that night, to meet a wish that was understood, took up the Bible.

It might have struck some there that perhaps he seemed a little changed, and had not once *looked any of them in the face.*

face. And whilst, as he read, his mouth was busied with the words that were written in that book, his heart was at the turn where Bolingbroke broke down.

CHAP. VI.

After the Derby.

R. LYLE, when he was not offering the odds, was almost always reading the Bible. He made a business of both. His liking for getting money by a running horse kept him to the one; the platform, that put its trust in him, kept him to the other.

After that Derby was run off, and the backers of Bolingbroke had been "put into a hole," Mr. Lyle, who had had some experience that way, found it, for the first time, hard to act.

He acted, under the pressure that was on him, however, very well; and the six serious gentlemen sitting round the table, thought

thought that they had never heard anything very much finer than his denunciation of that gathering on Epsom downs. They were sure a chosen person was about them.

Mr. Lyle, on the whole, made rather a fine picture out of it; it might be because he had cause to like what came of it as little as any one. But the belief in that room was, that Mr. Lyle apprehended, if horses carried out their engagements, a judgment from heaven on the race-courses of the world—at any rate, something searching from Exeter Hall.

It did not, in the least, occur to them, that the hypocrisy of the age might be much more likely to invite the judgment than even such a cause for sin as Vol-tigeur.

Ruy Lyle wanted to be alone to think; and he took up the Bible, not because what was written there, might lift him up beyond a greater loss, than what had happened upon Bolingbroke's running up the hill that day so very soft, but because he
meant

meant to live the lie, he was living, out. It concerned him, before those who were sitting there, to seem what he was not; and God's word, which has stood binding up in velvet and that sort of thing, was made to be this religious leader's trade. The infidel, blaspheming through the world, could hardly say, that any other than God's book, could have lived through that which all the Pharisees of every age have put upon its pages; and in a society where nothing is worshipped, that has not its own purpose to serve, the respectable, who make God's word a trade, may very well come to serve their use as tinder, when the world shall burn.

"You don't seem well, Mr. Lyle—it has been a day of sad trial; but you will have your reward."

These last words which referred to a reward, were ugly ones to Mr. Lyle.

"I shall be better presently," he said, doing what he could to throw aside the feeling that oppressed him, and wiping his brow,

brow, "it was a dreadful scene—it will be an awkward settling day for some."

"Yes, poor creatures; but let us hope they will find mercy," said that one of those sitting there, who seemed to be the strongest of all in his compassion.

Mr. Lyle saw that he had better not stay, for he could not help words like these slipping out sometimes; but the other ones about him did not at all see their meaning.

"You spoke of their peril to the people at the time, Mr. Lyle," said one who as yet had not said much.

The gentleman who spoke thought there could be no harm done in talking of the judgment-day, before the grand stand at Epsom.

"They will think of that next week, themselves," said Mr. Lyle; "thousands are as good as gone."

"Thousands! and so soon? You think they will be swept away next week in thousands?"

Mr. Lyle was talking of pounds sterling, and his religious friend of souls. He felt
that

that he would be saying, what he might not like to say, if he stopped on there ; so, without answering the question, he got up to go.

“ It seems to have been a great shock to you,” said one, as Mr. Lyle was bidding the company good night ; “ but you will want no hope from us ; your conscience will be your best reward.”

“ Conscience ” was the last word he heard as he passed out of the street door. It was not the word he wanted to go home on.

Ruy Lyle walked rapidly up the silent streets. He chose those streets that seemed the most deserted. If he had any purpose there at all, he meant to pass his night in them alone, or it might be with his conscience, as his friend suggested.

It was quite true that thousands had been dropped, and that some of them had been dropped by Ruy Lyle. It had been a part of his obligations to that platform world of which he was the head, that he should spend that evening with those men,
telling

telling them some of the fearful things he had seen at Epsom; and perhaps those hours, when he wanted to be at least by himself, had been worse than any he had had to bear that day. But he could think now of what he meant to do. And what he meant to do, the world would be likely to call his first crime. The life he had lived upon the platform was no crime, or a gentler judgment would give us many criminals. It had been an offering of the religious world against religion. It was only that Ruy Lyle had been followed, and God dishonoured. We are doing something very like it now, with other Ruy Lyles, and what we shall do will be more like it still in May.

It was the longest night, Ruy Lyle thought, that he had ever known. A clock struck three as he turned out of a thoroughfare at the West End, into one of the parks. It was just twelve hours since the flag had dropped, and Bolingbroke had started up that choking hill. Only twelve hours! And if twelve hours could feel so long as that,

that, Mr. Lyle wondered, as he sat down on the grass under a tree, what would be the seeming of eternity—of what would last for ever. Those twelve hours were a life, a longer life it seemed to him, than all the rest of that one which had begun in Bloomsbury Square.

Ruy Lyle did not often look back on what had been. He could remember a father who would not let him join his hands and kneel beside his bed, as some one had said his mother had taught him. But Ruy Lyle had never known a mother; and how many, standing with the full complement of the rivets of crime about them, breaking into little bits the Portland stone, look back and wonder if that woman, whom they never knew, would speak a word for them in heaven.

Ruy Lyle, as he lay there, looked around. He had preached in that same park not many months before, and he had come to that park now, to think out every link of the crime that he had set himself to do.

The world will be soon abroad again,
VOL. II. H and

and from that time he must cheat it all the more.

The policeman who had passed had looked at him. Was he changed? Did he seem like what he was? Was what he meant to do, written on his face? Ruy Lyle could once have smiled at such a thought, as that *his* face could tell out anything. But then he could not put the thought aside. To make it safe, he would not look men in the face.

It was five o'clock as he passed through the gates of the park, and the train which was to take him home would leave at seven.

As the time drew on, he began to feel that after all, he looked pretty much the same as usual. He got his breakfast of a woman who had extemporised an "early" stall outside the station; but even she seemed to find that there was something strange about him.

"I hope it's no bad news that brings you out so early," the woman said, as she was finding change for sixpence.

"What

“What makes you ask? Do I look strange?” asked Mr. Lyle, endeavouring to force a smile. But he felt that if that woman saw so much, he had very little schooled himself.

“You don’t look right, not as right as you might look — just as though you’d something to think on, that you didn’t like.”

His friends, the night before, had thought he did not look as he had always; and now this woman, who sold that stuff for coffee, thought the same.

He tried all that he could think of, on his journey down to look as he had looked before Bolingbroke fell back, beaten in the ruck.

He reached his home about the middle of the day. How was Mr. Aird, was the first question that he asked. Mr. Aird was better. Ruy Lyle looked pleased to hear it; but he was not pleased.

And Phinehas Aird *was* better. He had been a long time ill, but the doctor said

that now he might very well live on for weeks.

“For weeks, or a week?” asked Mr. Lyle anxiously, but yet not seeming to be anxious.

“There is no present symptom to kill him within the week,” said the doctor. “But you don’t seem looking very well yourself, Mr. Lyle.”

“Oh, I’m very well, but I was a little anxious about our dear friend here,” and the eyes of Ruy Lyle were filled with just the right measurement of tears. He was quite acting up to the occasion.

Mr. Lyle had seen enough up stairs. He must go on. The patient was reviving on animal food. Mr. Aird was good for another month, to all appearance; that was, as nearly as might be, a month too long; and then, what was the worst of it, Ruy Lyle was told by the doctor, that he himself was not looking as he had looked before the Derby. Had it come to this, that there was a point beyond which acting could not go?

go? Was he to be told he could not look any part he cared to look. He had not fallen yet so much away. He was not going yet to fall away. He was the same absorbing person to the secretaries of the societies, of which it had pleased much discrimination, to make him chairman. Here, by every post, were the letters coming to him, still asking him to patronize this or that safe Protestant idea. Mr. Lyle had no objection; he might as well patronize what was called religion still. But then he must learn to look, whatever he might care to seem. Mr. Aird was very glad to see him, as glad, at least, as he had ever been to see anybody.

“You look a little paler than you did though, Ruy; you’re sure you’re feeling well?” and he held out his hand to him who had been some time his adopted son.

“My dear sir, I’m feeling very well; it is very good of you to be so anxious; but shall we have a chapter together this evening?” And as he spoke, Ruy Lyle sat down by the bed-side and opened his

Bible, the old man the while fixing his fascinated eyes upon the reader; and when Ruy Lyle got up to leave, those eyes were never taken off him.

Mr. Lyle could see that if he at all had changed, his power over that man there had not.

His wife had been out when he returned, and going from the room of Mr. Aird, he met her on the stairs.

"You are not well, Ruy," she said, the first thing, as she stood looking into his face, her arms around his neck "or——"

"Or what?"

"Or something has gone wrong; you are keeping something from me."

Ruy Lyle thought that instant that it would be necessary for him, as soon as convenient, to become an honest man. The first thing that he should do was not to let his face tell anything. He would get to see himself in some glass when he could, and find out there, what he should do to look the same again.

She

She would soon know him for what he was ; but the world must still believe him to be what he was not.

“What do you think can have gone wrong, Helen?” and he spoke this softly, as he used to speak to her, when they first had met.

“No, Ruy, it is not that you are not changed ; you could not change ; it was nothing but your journey made you pale ;’ and as she spoke she looked as though she could never take her lingering eyes from off him ; and then she threw herself, without any of the strength to help it, at his feet, and told him there was nothing in the world like him.

Ruy Lyle smiled as he lifted up his wife ; she saw no change. With a very little common practice he would act out all that was before him ; and the time, when those things which had gathered up around him to try him, would soon come. He must tell her now, that he who in her woman’s heart she believed to be so good,
H 4 had

had spent his night upon the streets, taking thought to make the crime run smoothly, that he meant should stain her hands.

There were not many minutes more that he need act at all to her. Helen Lyle had followed for years to worship him, where it was light or dark. She had set him up before her as her idol; she would not be the first to hold her idol guileless whilst she worshipped crime.

As they went down the stairs, Ruy met his idiot child, the little one trying to get some notice.

“Take it away, Helen; take it away; why is it here?”

It was ever “it.” The child of Ruy Lyle’s own loins had never called him father. He did not care to let it call him that before the world.

“I want to speak to you a minute, Helen — *alone*.”

“How strange you seem, Ruy— why don’t ——”

“Why don’t I what, Helen?”

She

She wanted to say "look me in the face;" but she did not give him a straight answer.

"It was only my fancy, Ruy; it's nothing."

He could fashion his face to please her with a look. They entered Helen's own little room, and were alone. The sun was shining in brightly at the window, which was open, and there was borne to them the sound of the birds that were singing beyond.

"Shut out that noise, Helen,—those birds annoy me."

He had never liked the noise the sparrows had made even after the rain in Bloomsbury Square. There was something in that man, which filled his heart with hate for everything, that added nothing to the end he lived for.

As his wife went to shut the window, Ruy Lyle saw his own image in the glass. He certainly was not exactly what he used to be. If he meant to succeed in the world, it would not do for his face to be
H 5 letting

letting out what he thought of doing. This weakness might, perhaps, do for those who were taking to his line when they might be middle-aged; but he had been what he was, ever since his own father had knocked him off his knees, because he had got up there in the beginning of his life to pray. If he could not seem less like to what he was than that, it might come to this, that he would not look people in the face at all.

He rested against the chimney-piece, and leant his head upon his hand. His wife came up softly, and trustingly, yet a little awed, to him, as she always did.

“Did you want to speak to me, Ruy?”

He turned at the sound of her voice, and faced her.

“Yes, Helen, I believe I did. I have come down from London for no other cause than to speak to you; shut the door, and then sit down and listen.”

Helen did as she was told. He, too, spoke softly to her, as softly, she thought,

as

as he used to speak, but had not spoken very lately ; and she came and sat down on a chair by his knees.

“Helen, your father seems to be something better.”

“I hardly dare to hope much, Ruy ; but the doctor says so. I think, perhaps, my father may be spared to us a little longer.”

Ruy Lyle, from his very comfortable position on the platform he inspired, should have hardly objected to this way of putting it ; but if he must act almost always in the world, there was no need that he should do so in that room.

“Did the doctor say how long he thought your father might be spared, Helen—I came back, expecting that he would be dead?”

“Oh, don’t look like that, Ruy—you frighten me—you are not well.”

“Helen, you should know that it annoys me to hear that so often. I look very much the same as I always do,” and he changed his voice so that it sounded in

her ear, with just that sound it seemed to have, before their wedding-day.

"Helen," and she buried her face on his arm, "we have been very happy."

She looked upon him whilst she held her breath. "I do not think I am wrong in believing you would do anything for me — anything that life — anything that — that — death."

"Death! oh don't speak like that; there is some mystery in this. What do you mean, Ruy?"

"Helen, your father, perhaps, is over long in dying."

"You would hardly wish he did not linger, as he has not suffered pain?"

Mr. Lyle was a little put out, that his wife should want so many words to make that clear to her, which he had resolved on Epsom downs should be a very simple thing.

"But if I said that he must die?"

"You, Ruy, you? Oh don't speak like that, even in jest! Any one but you!"

"You do not seem to understand me,
Helen ;

Helen ; I thought that I was plain. I had hoped — hoped — your father might not have lived till now. It is my wish that ——”

She put her hand before his mouth to stop the word. He put it back, not harshly, only firmly, nothing more ; and said, “Helen, this is Thursday, your father should not live beyond next Monday.”

“I cannot fix his dying, Ruy, if I would. You do not know what you are saying.”

“Think again, Helen, think again. No, no. Come and sit down here. You may leave the handle of that door alone ; there are many ways of fixing when a man may die. Did you never hear of any ?”

She did not see his meaning yet ; she did not look to him for that one only meaning which such words could bear.

He took her hand and put it back. She only knew he did not care how soon her father died — that the wish, too, came from the man standing there before her would make it hers if he so willed it.

“I no not know what you would have
me

me do," was all that she could find the words to say.

"Then, Helen, if you are so dull, I must be plainer than I would. You have taken me to be what I am not, how many years? — no matter that, quite long enough. It is as well that we should both look back. Helen, my life has been a lie — a lie so long as you have known it. I ——"

"No, no, Ruy, *your* life, so pure and good; your life, that thing you say. You are speaking this to try me, Ruy;" and she came near him, trying to cast aside her fear, but he put her back.

"No, Helen, the time is past for that between us now."

"Ruy, if you jest too far you will drive me mad."

"What is there like a jest about me, then, to-day? I wish I could assure you that I never so little jested in my life. I do not wish you should go mad. I would rather you did not; but you might have known, when first I married you, it was
not

not love that brought me to you. I wanted what your father had been heap-
ing up, and had to leave. I was so nearly
then having to go about to beg that it was
worth my while to take you. You have
lain here, Helen," and he pressed his hand
to his left side. "You thought I loved
you. The world believed I did. That
old man dying now upstairs believed it;
but everything had been a great while
dried up within me that could love, before
we met. I had lost everything I ever had
to lose, on racing. Some one, one day,
happened to say that I could make a
preacher. I tried, and it was said I made
a very good one; and then, with good
profits, I walked this earth a living lie.
My father once had struck me down, when
the only prayer my mother taught me was
upon my lips. But because I preached,
and found it pay, I did not find that that
was any cause why I should cease from
laying wagers. I have used this book here,
Helen, as a trade; but preaching such as
mine is a trade amongst the men that have
looked

looked up to me. We were married. I promised I would love you ; but where the lie began it ended. *I have never loved you, Helen.* I could have, perhaps, forgotten you were old, and not well-looking, but for that idiot thing that, had it had speech, would have called me father. But for all those years you did not know me better than the world I fooled ; and it is quite likely you might not have even known it now, but for that cursed horse that broke down yesterday. Don't start if I do speak out a little roughly. You thought I went to tell the world to keep away from running horses ; and, Helen, so I did ; but I went to back the horse — the brute — that was first beaten. I cannot help it if the world was taken in. It put me where I am. It is the few that care so little for excitement, and hysterics, who follow God. They are the fools who follow preachers such as I. It matters nothing when your father dies. It matters everything that I should pay, or else there may be questions asked. But when he
does

does die must be any time within three days. No further hurry over it is needed. His money can only save us now — shall I go on, Helen? have I said enough?"

The wife of Ruy Lyle had heard him to that word; and she had cried out no sound at all to stop him. It was the breaking up of a dream. Her eyes were dry; if she spoke it would be to bid him kill her. He had told her that he did not love her; that he never had; but still she seemed to feel that what he told her she must do — if it was to stop the breath of the old man lying there up stairs — of him who had shut out all the world to live for her.

She tried to near the face which overshadowed her. She did not know then what she did. She had heard him out. And after she had heard it she was his — chained to him for ever. His will she must bow down to; and, by and by, if she should last so long, she might even get to like it; but it looked then as death's-head on a church-yard wall looks to a little child.

"It's annoying that hours should be of
consequence,

consequence, but it won't do later than next Monday, Helen."

She seized his hand. He tried to put her back.

"I will never ask it, Ruy, in this world again, but if I do this thing you will—you will love me?—"

"And can you do it, Helen, if I say I will?"

"You know that there is nothing, at least I do not know what it can be, I would not do for *that*."

"And if I say I do not think I can?"

"I will yet do it, Ruy, for the hope you may; and if not, our crime shall make us one hereafter."

He threw back her hand as though it left a taint. He only felt that she would do the thing. He did not feel it was for him that she could do it.

There may be, even in this world, that power to make us feel that hell would not be hell, to live out its eternity with that, which was to us this earth's only love.

"Helen,

“Helen, I shall not be back till Monday night, and then——”

At his feet she kneeled—“And then, Ruy, we, for ever and ever, must be one—one, if there is a mercy great enough for us—one if——”

“You have work enough to do up stairs, and so have I elsewhere; three committee meetings between now and Monday.”

He was gone. She *bad* her work to do; and if he loved her when that work was done,—“Ruy, tell me only that, and you need never tell the world again that Helen Lyle’s your wife.”

In the glass before her, she saw the face which he called “old, and not well looking.” How many years seemed added on, since he had told her what he was. It might be hard to get his love upon his terms, and when she thought of what might yet be hers, it did not even look like crime, that thing which he had laid on her to do.

It was late on Monday night when Ruy Lyle came back. He asked no question
of

of the servants, but went to the little room where he had left Helen on the Thursday morning. She was there to meet him. He looked into her face.

“He is dead?”

“He died last night.”

“You have killed your father, Helen?”

“I *have* done that thing; but do *you* remind me of it?” and as she spoke she tried to take his hand. She had done his bidding, and she came up to the brink of the new life that she believed her crime would give them.

“Belonging of hell, I have no other use for you.”

She fell down, cold and heavy, at his feet. He stooped to lift her up, and in coming to she twined her arms around his neck.

“We both are that belonging, Ruy; but it was for you I am.”

“You would find it difficult to make the world believe it.”

“It was you who told me.”

“How will you prove that?”

“It

“It was you who made me do it.”

“I *made* you do nothing.”

“But you knew you said enough ; you knew the power of one word—you——”

“There has been enough of this—your father’s money will be yours, and because it will be yours, it will be mine. The world has never known you as my wife ; you shall have enough for what you shall want and your child.”

“Whatever that may be, it must be near you, Ruy.”

“And I would rather it were not.”

“And if I tell you that you shall not part us ?”

“It would not be wise ; I might be urged to talk of that upstairs.”

“Then say it now—go to that door and call the servants in—I did that thing for you. I do not ask that you should tell the world I am your wife, but near where you are, there I *will* be. I will help you to the worst that you can do to me.”

“I will think over this.”

“And

“And the least time is too long for you to think.”

But Ruy saw she meant it, and he gave her leave not to live with, but near him; and not at all as one he owned.

She had done that much to grasp at what she longed for; and as he turned to go, she, who for years had bowed before him, kneeled at his feet for even that. For all that he had made her do, she, as he cast her off for ever, did not hold to him the less.

He saw it, and he smiled; and as he went up stairs to see the thing that she had done, he felt he could afford to smile. It was his power above all — his power which his wife acknowledged, and to which the world, that made him what he was, confessed.

CHAP. VII.

The People's Man.

HINEHAS AIRD, it was understood, had been as nearly as could be, prepared to die. He was getting 8 per cent. at the time for some of his money, and was about half way through a volume of some Bible Christian's sermons.

He had shut himself out of the world, as a matter of business, for years. He had been remarkably successful, and he himself attributed his success to knowing no one.

Phinehas Aird had set aside what was to him a general rule, to know Ruy Lyle; and he would let Ruy Lyle, at pleasant intervals,

intervals, read out to him the Bible Christian's sermons.

It had occurred to Phinehas Aird, when he was about fifty, that there was, to say the least of it, a good deal of needless risk in putting faith in his own kind ; so it happened that in the fifty-first year of his age, he declined the world. This gave him abundant time, instead of leaving his card at people's houses, to watch the money market, and master the most encouraging works of the nonconforming divines.

And he had time to study both with some success. He was not quite so sure as he wanted to be after a while, whether he had done wisely in knowing Ruy Lyle. Phinehas Aird liked him perhaps as well as he could make up his mind to like any body. He liked to hear him at certain seasons explain many of the dark things contributed to controversy by the Bible Christians ; but there was this on the other side ; it was not entirely satisfactory that Mr. Lyle had not made money.

Phinehas

Phinehas Aird never quite believed in any one who, at some time or other, had not made money. So he did not consult his son-in-law about his will. He bought a shilling form, which was rather soiled, for tenpence, and sat up one night to make it himself.

He left everything that he had to his only child, Ruy Lyle taking a life-interest in it. Beyond this, it was his will that the whole of the property should revert to any child of his daughter, born in any marriage. It was witnessed by those who were sufficiently likely to forget that they had set their hand to anything, as soon as it was done. So Phinehas Aird thought he might be satisfied, that no one would know what he meant to do, with all the money he had made.

Indeed, his suspicion went to put his own child out of his confidence; for Helen, herself, knew no more than the world; and it was only on the day he died he told her anything about it.

Phinehas Aird had been a great deal
VOL. II. I worse

worse throughout the day. The spasms which came upon him, just when he was mostly concerned, to think how much per cent. the Bible Christians thought kept speculation on the Christian side of usury, were a great hindrance to the calculation. But the doctor did not know his patient was so near the end.

It was the evening of the day when Helen Lyle meant to do the work, that was to crown her guilt with an uncertain love.

Phineas Aird was worse ; but he might yet, if he was left to his figures, live out, perhaps, another week, the doctors said.

What was to be done must be done before another night had come ; and when he took the draught he always now took the last thing every night, to keep him then from thinking of his figures over long, she could give, what would put another world between her father and another day.

When she went to him, with the draught so mixed, he was reading a paper,
over

over which he gurgled some glad sound, whilst he grasped it tightly in his hand.

The sermons of the Bible Christians had been next to the last thing he would read, but quite the last thing was his will.

“Come here, Helen; I don’t know that you did the best thing you could have done in marrying again. You had your chance of getting rid of knowing any one; it was a great chance, and you did not take it. But if he is about the best you could have had, he is not going to make a present of my money to other people by and by. There — there’s no one listening, eh? you are sure? It’s yours, Helen, all yours; all the money I have made, and after you, it is the child’s. It was a bad business your having another child; and if he should die, the money goes to that other boy of Dryden’s, that still lives—doesn’t it? This is the best I could do for you, Helen; but you never wanted me away out of this world, Helen, to get what I had to leave. I think this is about as near as may be my last night. There, take it Helen, no one

12

knows



knows I ever made that will but you — no one, for I wasn't quite fool enough to have a lawyer, to let him find out what I did with my money. Good night, Helen, there's nothing ill between us, eh! You've never wanted my life, as most do, when there's anything to get. I think I'm ready to die, Helen. I don't know that there's anything more to keep me — yes, there's just this, don't change the security about; it's only so much in the brokers' pockets. What was it I had to say? Everything is slipping away now — oh! yes, I forgot to tell you that my broker does it for a little less than's usual — and now I think I have mentioned about all."

But Phinchas Aird had said too much for Helen Lyle. "You never wanted my life;" and what was to take his life was there in her own hands.

He had loved her in his way, and the paper she held in her hand was the thing by which he the most meant to show it. He held out his hand, which was a great thing for him to do, and she fell down at
his

his bed-side, and the hot tears dropped upon the will.

“Keep it dry, Helen, keep it dry; you’ve nothing to cry about; but I don’t know that I would rather you were glad that I am almost dead — almost, Helen; I think the last night’s fairly come; give me my draught, and I will drink it presently.”

The last words of Ruy Lyle came up before her. He might love her when this thing was done. He had not drawn his power closer and closer round her for those past eight years, for her to start from doing that.

“He will love me!” and as that one absorbing influence laid its grasp upon her, she poured the draught out to the dregs.

She looked on her father, who by his heavy breathing seemed already to have fallen into a restless sleep. He would drink it when he woke, and Helen Lyle, as she turned away, saw her father for the last time whilst he lived.

She had done her part.

She crept up into her own room. There was what seemed to her the face of Ruy Lyle on the wall before her, and then it had a mocking look to her. It was for that face to turn its love on her, that that blood was on her hands, which the pumice-stone of time could never in this world rub out.

How could he who was flesh of her flesh do anything now but cast her off. He would hate her for the success of his own temptation. But her father might not have drunk it yet. There was no blood that minute on her hands. She had got the strength she wanted, and of that blood they should be ever clean. It was all dark and still when she reached her father's room; but there was light enough for her to see too much — the draught was gone. She knelt down to tell her father in her agony, it was death for him to sleep, and she spoke out her agony; but he was still, and he would be that for ever.

It

It has been told how her husband met her when he came back to see what his power was.

Phinehas Aird had so long been ill that his sudden dying on that night created no suspicion.

When Helen left the room, and had poured the draught into the cup, the doctor, unobserved by her, had entered by an opposite door, and finding the dying man asleep, had told the servant she might take the draught away. Phinehas Aird had never drunk it; but when the glass had been emptied, it had been brought back, the room darkened, that the sick man might sleep undisturbed; and for a little while he did sleep undisturbed, but from that sleep he never woke.

This was never known to her, to whom the knowledge would have mattered most—to Helen Lyle.

When Ruy returned, and told her they must part, and that, as his wife, he would never own her to the world again, she did not tell him of her father's will, or any-

thing about it, but kept it back, as she thought it might yet some day give her sons their right.

The house was broken up after Phinehas Aird was buried. It was not difficult to conceal from the world the secret that Ruy Lyle was ever married. No one, from the life that Phinehas Aird had so long lived, knew anything about his daughter's second marriage.

Ruy Lyle stood higher than he ever had before the world ; and that, which he stood so high before, was, of course, the "safe" side of the religious world.

Mr. Lyle was now entirely free to give his attention to the weights for the Goodwood Cup.

The burying away of Phinehas Aird had been no reason even why the odds against Canezou, at Ascot, should not be taken. Mr. Lyle was not, indeed, at Ascot, because of the funeral, either with a ream of tracts, or with his betting-book ; but he stood to win a largish stake upon the cup.

Mr. Lyle no longer lived with his wife,
and

and in those circles in which he carried on his trade, it was not known that he had been ever married.

It was about this time that Mr. Lyle's influence in the platform world had reached its height. It may be a matter of opinion whether, in the abstract, the platform world is wholly unobjectionable; whether God's kingdom will be at all hastened by it; and whether anybody will be much the better for it, other than the printer who "sets up" the tracts. It may be sufficiently harmless for a benevolent looking gentleman to open the proceedings with a hesitating prayer, as a preparation for a series of resolutions, of an extreme kind, against everything that is not considered to be "Protestant."

Religion has had a great deal to bear; but it may be that it has had nothing much harder to bear than its treatment periodically in the West Strand. There seems to be a simplicity, hardly in character with the "business habits" of the age, in the choice of leaders for this platform

15

world.

world. It does not appear that a "safe" Protestant need be better than any one else. A man has only to evidence a striking capacity for preaching, or for extemporaneous prayer about the remarkable capabilities of "faith," to receive the unmixed confidence of the platform world.

Some late experience has shown this simplicity to be unequal to the age, and more of these preachers than one have received distinctive mention in the Recorder's charge.

Suspicion, in such society, will be naturally a very distressing sort of bar to comfortable membership. But there have been too many Ruy Lyles put in the chair in the platform world of late. It, of course, seems to some that this is quite the great modern evidence of what a carnal aggregate the platform world is proof against; but it may also very well occur to others, how little this particular form of the religious world has in common with religion.

It may be considered necessary, as a sort of mark of particular grace, to get to the chair

chair in some society. There has been no result as yet to evidence, that the arrival at the chair at all hastens the getting to heaven.

But there is another platform which, in its comprehensiveness, is hardly held to be less sacred. The licence to talk nonsense seriously, is not entirely a belonging of what is called "religious liberty." The symptom is not at present a monopoly, and Mr. Lyle was considered to present very tolerable materials for the "people's man."

The character demanded for the part is easily come by, and by a great variety of ways.

As the world may very well continue bad, even in the face of "Evangelical" energy, there will be characterless persons quite sufficient to preserve the compliment of the "people's men."

Mr. Lyle found it desirable to be of opinion, that the Book of Common Prayer was not such a study as he could extemporaneously offer, and that you did nothing

better by being within the church than by being without it.

Indeed, it was to the interest of those societies to which he belonged, to believe that it was the safest thing on the whole to be outside.

Such a man as Ruy Lyle has, perhaps, a right to expect to find these opportunities, or he might say that there was nothing to exactly suit him in the world. If you were to abolish the periodical religion of May, you would abolish some well-meaning people, and you would also abolish some very indifferent ones.

The influence of Mr. Lyle was entirely on the surface, but it was an influence that it was the pleasantest not to challenge.

It seemed to be a very good, and safe, and privileged sort of thing, and its power consisted in its general avoidance of suspicion. Had there been no such thing as a religious world, Mr. Lyle might well have said that there was no place in the world to give him proper prominence.

The

The last thing to have attracted him would have been the religion that God gave, and that has, as yet, thank God, survived the patronage of the platform, and the meetings of May.

But Mr. Lyle, who had not done badly, where the amount of the annual subscription may a good deal determine a man's right to be considered covered with grace, or unlikely, thought he saw a way to do as well for himself on the "Liberal" platform.

He had everything that those boards demanded ; but he was some degrees above the common agitator, who sometimes wants the words to conceal his own ends.

It never entered the mind of Ruy Lyle to think whether he cared or did not care for the people. But he had done very well in professing certain convenient things that were held to be religious — professions that had come to an arrangement with his own convenience. It would be very easy to say he liked the people. He knew nothing about them, but that he
might

might presently think them fools for believing it.

Still it would answer his purpose very well to say he liked them very much ; and, on inquiring, he found that this was all that was wanted.

But what he, perhaps, thought to be the best and easiest, was that it did not seem he would have anything to do. There was nothing imperative about the new line he was approaching, but that he must promise everything ; and if this might seem a little hard, there was this set-off—it was quite as imperative that he should do nothing.

The agitator declares that he wants to see the end of every sham — this answers every purpose without going any further. His antipathy to shams is taken for granted, and he is not called upon, in the general attack on shams, to abolish himself.

The constitutional party, we are told, has no toleration, and a great deal more, as conveniently and necessarily false ; and this is worked up into any order of oppression

sion to carry an election, or blacken a cause. It is nothing different as applied to those unhealthy clap-traps "Reform" and "Progress." The great "Liberal Party" has done nothing for either; it never will. But the great "Liberal Party," which lives by shifts the more scrupulous would struggle to despise, is just able to understand that it best appropriates a position of seeming sincerity by distorting the intentions and traducing the policy of others. To get possession of the name of the "Great Liberal Party" was a great thing gained. They had then only to magnify their own professions, and to pander to each fashion which became popular in turn. After that there was the taste of the irresistible president of those dealers in a sharply competitive street, where the one grand principle of trade, is to keep the hesitating purchaser from the house over the way. "Liberalism" is for the people just so long as it suits its own purpose. It panders by rule. It is patriotic by accident.

Mr.

Mr. Lyle, ever since he had first considered the matter, to see what might be got out of it, to his own advantage, was not without the belief that he might quite as well as not become the "people's man."

He had found one side of the religious world to be a resource that could be made very serviceable. It had done more for him than Mincing Lane had ever done for his father.

"Liberalism," he found, upon the inquiry he had laid out upon it, did not do a great deal for "the people;" but then it denied that anybody else could do anything. That was all that he would have to do, to be "the people's man."

He thought it might be likely to suit him. He had never fairly liked tracts, but there was something in the system that provided for his going with a ream of them to Epsom on the Derby Day. In both worlds, the platform, secular and religious, he found that there were protests which took in betting, and which might take in the people.

Mr.

Mr. Lyle was in London during the autumn of the year in which Phineas Aird had died, and his occupation was just then a mixed one. There was a proposition for a revision of the Liturgy, which he had been asked to undertake by one of the societies that found the Book of Common Prayer something of an obstacle to what it wanted, and then there was the St. Leger betting which he had to watch.

It was about this time that Mr. Lyle declared in public, that a point or two more must be got out of those who had a prejudice for the Prayer Book as it was, and when he had found that the market prices would not give him another point against Voltigeur, that the member for a large "Liberal" constituency died.

Two or three of the gentlemen, who on such occasions are always mentioned as likely to come forward, did come forward, went through all the moral gymnastics of competition over pledges, and then having discovered some frightful secret influence

fluence that would be used to their hurt, retired.

But there was no such influence that could be over much for Ruy Lyle.

The pure Protestant party in the constituency, led on by the print that represents them and the prize ring in the daily press, were unanimous that he should be solicited to stand, as Protestant parties generally are.

Then he was the sincere friend of "civil and religious liberty," and talked those things which it is very necessary to profess, but not nearly so necessary to believe in.

And of all this it came that Mr. Lyle was asked to stand. He answered every question very properly, and out of compliment to what was held to be the religious party in the borough, did not think he could subscribe to the Borough Cup.

Mr. Lyle's eminent services in the cause of that Protestantism which had been handed down, from a position which was not defined to a year that was, were very
feelingly

feelingly referred to. The same speaker then passed on to the influence for good that Mr. Lyle had exercised, and to the position he occupied in the "religious world." This last position being held to be conclusive of his being worth their having.

Mr. Lyle, who had felt a little uncomfortable when his influence for good was undergoing the ordeal of the alderman's English, pledged himself to everything to which it was possible to get pledged in a given time, but which it was impossible to do; and a constituency exercising a function empowered by the constitution, was considered to have done a great deal for itself, and a great deal for "pure Protestantism."

Mr. Lyle was received in the House of Commons as a man whose position was so exceptional, as to give him at once the ear of Parliament. Nor was it only by the party to whose opinions he professed allegiance. There was nothing about Ruy Lyle that marks the man who is an agitator, or a religionist, by trade.

His

His personal influence secured him from the suspicion of even those who thought his "views" detestable. If it was a party only that believed him to be infallible,—it was a nation that would not disbelieve him honest. There was that in his look, no matter where he might be, which, if it was not always pleasant to remember, was always hard to forget.

He never looked up.

He could not face the very homage that his own inscrutable and mysterious power, amongst those with whom he mingled, gave him.

The first time he ever rose to speak, was when the House of Commons had one of its annuals before it—the punishment of death. And Ruy Lyle declared against the command of blood for blood, in a speech which one of the oldest members there said he had never heard surpassed. It was looked upon as something gained in the direction of a humanitarian's millennium. It was not likely that parliament should see the latter end of Phinehas Aird. And
before

before the house broke up, Ruy Lyle was looked upon as one of those influences which set him high as "the people's man."

The illustrated papers gave his face, from a sketch, whilst he was talking of the sin of racing in the Strand.

When September came, he stood on Voltigeur, and would not hedge on the deciding heat — whilst the purest Protestantism elsewhere took down his words, and set them out in round-hand texts for little boys.

CHAP. VIII.

The Verdict.

R. LYLE had certainly done a good deal better for himself, than even the only sons of Mincing Lane brokers always do.

On the death of Phineas Aird, Ruy Lyle went out into the world, and lived as though he had never known or had a wife or child.

It was certainly something which carried weight on the other side of the account, that the arrangement included his keeping them; but then it was no departure from the letter of the understanding that that should be done on a very little.

Ruy Lyle knew that he only kept his
wife

wife out of that which, whilst he lived, she should have shared with him, by holding up a very hideous sort of skeleton. He comforted himself, whenever he thought of the thing at all, that if she did look thin, and a good deal older than a year's very bad wear warranted, that he was keeping the breath in the body of a parricide. Sometimes she asked for more so strongly, that it occurred to him that parricides might like to eat and drink so as to feel they had had one full meal at last; but she must not put it too emphatically before him, or else he must produce his skeleton.

Whilst he remained in London, and saw deputations on matters which were considered to be of Protestant urgency, three times a week, from twelve until three o'clock, his wife and stricken child were kept out of sight in a narrow street in Blackfriars.

The estate of Phinehas Aird was worth some looking after. Mr. Aird might have been uncomfortable, even after death, had it

it been conveyed to him, that his money had gone to any one who did not care so much for it, as to care for nothing else.

Phinehas Aird, whilst he lived, cared for very little else ; and Ruy Lyle gave up such time as he could spare from the consideration of particularly Protestant questions, to the seeing how he could best make that which Phinehas Aird had left, for ever his.

Mr. Lyle knew of no will ; but he thought it just possible that the uses of the skeleton might die away some day, and that Meg might speak out, even though it might go hard with her for speaking ;—so, he thought he would be rid of those, when he could best put them out of the way, who, after his wife, could alone claim what Phinehas Aird had left.

He had only very lately thought out, with any purpose, what society would call a crime. He had married a woman whom he hated, and whom he entirely meant to avoid, when the fitting time should come ; but there would be a serious inconvenience
about

about calling this a crime, or St. George's, Hanover Square, might have something to answer for.

But ever since the day that Bolingbroke ran "soft," Ruy Lyle saw nothing which it was not possible for him somehow to reach.

If anything happened to stand rather awkwardly before him, its removal might be arranged, so as to suit him, in a great variety of ways.

Phinchas Aird had been in the way with a remarkably strong constitution, getting over spasm after spasm; but Phinchas Aird, after giving some trouble, was carried away. There was nothing that a little of such ordinary contriving might not do, even to the length of so getting rid of others; and Ruy Lyle, just then, was more the platform idol than he had ever been, since he had first taken to that line.

He knew that his wife had a son, by a former marriage, living,—a curate in the north of England; and as it had something concerned him to know, he had

found out more particularly where that son lived.

It seemed to Ruy Lyle that there might be an after inconvenience, if this son should live too long. He might get to know who he was,—that could be determined later, when that son had lived quite long enough.

The idiot child, his wife had borne to him, did not trouble him so much. It had fits, and one of these fits, Mr. Lyle rather believed, would be stronger than the others that had gone before, and would save him any more particular pains.

Ruy Lyle did not forget that his wife had said, the first time he had lifted up the skeleton before her, she would never hold her peace if he should ever raise his hand against her child.

But Mr. Lyle, looking at it as he looked at everything, did not believe a word of it. He did not believe in any people putting themselves in peril for their own kind. There is always an Englishman
where

where a life is to be saved, or money to be made; but Mr. Lyle only believed in the assembling of his countrymen, for any purposes of action, over the last great matter. If his wife should do what she had threatened, no one would believe her. No one would be likely to believe her as against the leader of "Evangelical Protestantism;" and before there was a chance of that being likely, he would very effectively introduce his skeleton.

So he got as near as he could to Helen's eldest son; and he bought the Hall at St. Hilda's, which happened then to be for sale; and the first thing that he tried to do was to get John Wycherley within his power.

Nor was it a thing to be avoided, or a thing to be lightly liked to get within that power; and John Wycherley came up to it, as all the world did then; and Ruy Lyle soon saw that the work he had on hand would not be very hard.

Years before, when Helen, who then bore the name of Dryden, had put her

son out of sight of her father, she had given him the name of Wycherley, and so by that had John Dryden been ever after called.

But though she never saw him, and though he, too, grew up without knowing that he had a mother, she took every care that he should never want. She had him placed where he could take no hurt; and in after years, it was through her means that he was presented to the perpetual curacy of St. Hilda's the less.

Helen Lyle did not suspect that Ruy knew that he who passed as Wycherley was her own son; and when Ruy Lyle had bought the Hall, and asked his maiden aunt, Miss Strake, to come and live there, it was thought best and safest that Helen Lyle should change her name.

She was to pass as one of Ruy Lyle's broken down dependants, and out of this purpose she came to be called Meg — her strange seeming having added to it amongst all who knew her the prefix of "mad."

Helen Lyle had lost her reason for
awhile,

awhile, after that day when Ruy Lyle came back to mock her with her crime, and she looked almost as mad as she was said to be ; and she seldom spoke to any one.

Miss Strake had never known that Ruy Lyle was married, having herself always lived abroad on the little she had ; so the secret of what was, and what had been, seemed little likely ever to be known.

Mr. Lyle, soon after his coming to the Hall, had been returned for the county, — this return being considered, under some devout aspects, to be quite a providential thing for pure Protestant principles. Mr. Lyle had heard of Mona Ken, but had never seen her till Reuben Ken came back with his dead wife from Aden.

Ruy Lyle had never lived untainted since he had grown into a man, and to make the change just then it would be necessary to complete a short calculation whether it would be worth his while, as a matter of business.

He could not look on Mona Ken to
make

make her his, but as a foul dishonour. Mr. Lyle could discuss this sort of thing on moral grounds elsewhere ; but he meant to make Mona Ken his wife — his wife whilst Helen lived. He could go into the world, and show that world the simple loveliness that followed him.

It was a feeling new enough to him, but Ruy Lyle did feel he had come at last to love something that God had fashioned pure. It would answer his purpose to have her by his side, and beyond this, his heart, which had been so long dead, was speaking to him what it felt.

But Ruy Lyle soon saw that Mona Ken loved his own wife's son. This certainly did matter something. His wife's son was in his way, but it mattered only that there was another reason why this son should not be an inconvenience long. This man, who was called Wycherley, stood in his path. It would be no great thing if the path was cleared as soon as might be ; and not long after, he mixed the "wine stuff," as Meg called it, for John Wycherley.

It

It would have been enough for Helen when she saw that the man she was so chained to, loved another; but that other one was loved by her own son; and when John Wycherley first said he burned, she saw in an instant, and shadowed out the death that was prepared for him.

Never after that, could she be taken from his side; and in very early days John Wycherley would have died, had she not been there close by to give the only antidote. She might have spoken, but she saw suspicion went against herself, and she felt that she might then have been accused, and not served him. It was no thought, then, for her own life that weighed with Helen Lyle. But for her, there was in her own being an agony that was something beyond her strength to bear.

She could not hate her husband as she would. There was yet a cursed rag, of what had once been power, clinging to her still. She very often felt that she could have gone to him, and bade him do his worst; but she as often felt she could not
K 4
give

give him up for all that he was giving in that cup ; and so she watched the hand of her own husband against the life of her own son.

But Mr. Lyle was met with an antagonism he was not at all prepared for.

It was not difficult for him to see that Crispin Ken had got his measure. The influence which, in the world, was at the feet of Ruy Lyle, was a fraud, a mockery, haunted by a hideous past ; and it was about the only thing which Ruy Lyle acknowledged to himself, had ever moved him. If his influence was almost universally acknowledged, he could only feel that Crispin Ken had seen him through and through.

It is sufficiently possible that his own party, in the platform world, will consider the career of Ruy Lyle to be one no leader of "Evangelical Protestantism" would be at all likely to furnish. But as that platform happens to have supplied the matter, it cannot object to its application.

We live in times when that platform
has

has its influence, and when there is a growing belief that its religious professions have sometimes really a foundation in religion.

It is difficult to believe that grammar can ever recover from confusion, when you hear a vestryman upon his legs ; and it is as difficult to believe that religion can ever recover its simplicity, after its treatment by the platform of “ Evangelical Protestantism.” If this platform has generally done a great deal for hypocrisy, it has only failed when it has done nothing for bitterness. It has often been necessary to apologise for the folly of some of its conclusions, and for the rancour of some of its attacks ; but latterly, it has been necessary to give hard labour to some of its members.

It is, perhaps, unfortunate, that this frenzy should be encouraged to satisfy those who must have even their hatreds over the Bible. But had religion anything to do with much of what is called religious, the evil would be greater ; and it might go further than in giving to such men as Ruy

Lyle the unsuspected opportunity to parody piety by programme in the West Strand.

Mr. Lyle believed, to a great extent, in chance, but to no extent in a God. And he could not very well help thinking, that the world he led, took him with less inquiry than would an old lady, who wanted a quiet handmaid from the country, rather cheap.

But it was new to him to see his influence analysed and his power suspected. It was not hard for him to know, that from the time of his first going to the Parsonage, Crispin Ken did not give to him the same place which he received at the hands of the world.

Ruy Lyle believed that he might, in his own time, have had the heart of Mona Ken within his reach, but for Crispin Ken's unexpressed suspicion. He might have set his foot much oftener within Reuben's home, but for the ever-searching look of Crispin Ken; and when Jim was thrown into the race, the worst witness of the deed came up in Crispin Ken.

It

It was but little satisfactory to be told that Crispin was given to be "uncharitable," and that his was the sort of speech which was to be always found in the mouths of those who wanted "charity."

Ruy Lyle was not over-much inclined to be very critical towards himself; but he thought better of Crispin Ken than he ever thought of any other man. Mr. Lyle had, with great readiness, at the most effective time, made his own terms with the world, and yet from one who was only starting—learning, in the midst of want, to live on 60*l.* a year—had come the look which searched him through and through.

Crispin Ken had been the first to challenge what was called the "influence" of Ruy Lyle; and there was no saying what sort of construction might be put on the challenge. It was not a smooth thing to do, to pull apart about the holiest man, who ever kept his place upon credulity.

It was entirely competent for people, who were great judges, to say that it was no other than the son of a clergyman who

was setting himself up against so very good a man ; and at St. Hilda's it was generally believed, that of all things Crispin Ken wanted to upset a better man, than by any chance he could ever get to be himself. Indeed, it would have been hard, even amongst the most benevolent, for Crispin to have explained this faith away.

He had heard that same thing said about "his want of charity" before ; and he held his peace ; for he could have been ill heard above such sounds, whilst every "charitable" tongue wagged out its Christian horror.

His time had come, when the weeds of the race had clung round the body of the idiot boy. Then the world, which, with its sagacity, pointed another way, believed — not that it had been taken in — but that Crispin Ken had, of some accident, not turned out very wrong.

Religious influence must be, from the number of its professors, perhaps, of any influence, the easiest to be simulated well. There were not ten found who could stand the searching test in the Cities of the Plain ;

Plain ; and whilst it might not be hard to get together, in a good-sized room, any number of what are called “ deservedly respected people,” it might be quite as hard to find the ten that Abraham could not find, in the moral city of London in 1861.

It is not saying any too much that the ten would be looked for in these days on some genial platform, to startle the world out of ten evils ; for it is believed that these platforms keep society from going to the bad. The consolation, that those excluded from the general confidence, that the platform gives, would get, is that the ten might not be found, where the witness of what is best, and purest, and brightest, is never found — in the minutes of any society.

Chiefly because Crispin Ken did not believe at all, as other people did who were said to be judges, in Ruy Lyle, there was great unanimity in the belief that Crispin was not nearly so “ serious ” a man as he might be ; and it is so to-day, and it will be

be so to-morrow. It is the religion of the world that discusses heaven quarterly ; but it must be the religion of God that has survived the platform.

The power of Ruy Lyle was an influence, and so it remained when crime was even marked upon his grave ; and for awhile it had been too much for Crispin Ken.

It was an influence as unintelligible in the House of Commons. The voice, and face, and fascination of Ruy Lyle were the voice, and the face, and the fascination of no common idol ; and he knew that those amongst whom he moved, felt it to be beyond their power to cast such influences off. He could see that some people often believed they saw him when he was not even near ; that they heard him speak when he was miles away ; and that he asked what they feared he would be asking.

He knew it ; and he depended everything on such a feeling being well kept up. Beyond this he took some pains to let the
fancy

fancy gather strength ; but though there was something in it which happened to be founded on the influence of the man, and which so was real, it might often have admitted of a much more common explanation.

When it had been often thought that Mr. Lyle was not anywhere in the neighbourhood — and the feeling that he yet was near gave power to the belief in what was called his influence — he was in reality where he could best hear, and where he did hear what was going on ; though, whilst this was not always so, the influence of few other men could have lived so long, and so little suspected, upon false pretences ; and it *was* an influence, meet it how you would.

He could make you, without a spoken word, tell what he wanted to know. He was meant only for what he was, to show how what was really good took nothing when he was at his meridian, and suffered nothing by his fall.

It would have been a life of waste for
such

such a man to have lived it out over the risks of Mincing Lane.

His wife had herself declared what she believed her crime to be ; his skeleton had come to pieces.

It had been very hard for him to feel, when all the world offering him mottos came about him, that a fool had ever sprung from him. It was hardly a comfort that his one son was so much a fool, — he could not even find a cause to hate him. It was hard for Ruy Lyle to feel that that which should have borne his name before the world, could only cry “Chuck ! chuck !”

Putting everything into the account, the life of Ruy Lyle had been on the whole a long, and not unprofitable game ; but the only game his own heir loved was throwing dirt about in balls.

His wife had always said that she would speak if he should raise his hand against the life of Jim, and she *bad* spoken out ; and his crime had been told to the world,
in

in the confession that put on record her own shame.

She had been content never to declare herself to Wycherley, because it was an oath sworn to Ruy Lyle years before ; and she never would ; nor had they ever spoken of him when they had met together in the curate's house. Ruy Lyle knew well enough, it was not unknown to Meg, that he had found out that John Wycherley was her son ; but to speak about it was a thing they mutually avoided, and Meg had never dared declare herself to her own son. It had been agreed before they married, years before, when Ruy found out she had a son who might inherit what her father had to leave, that in the face of the world she should never call him son again, and she never did—she kept her word.

It was not even entirely a consolation to think, that Mr. Lyle had always taken in the very best society, and that he continued to take in a part of it to the last.

He *bad* taken in the world ; the fooling
had

had been general, and had stopped short alone of Crispin Ken.

Ruy Lyle, for all that some of his religious papers said, was down; and if he lived, he who had said so much against the law of blood for blood from his place in the House of Commons, might yet be even hanged outside a gaol.

If he lived! But the chords that ached on his left side, told him that he would be spared that thing.

Some people said, when he got about again, he would clear himself. It was "too shocking" to be believed that so good a man, that a man who had done so much, so repeatedly for religion, should have made away with his own flesh and blood, in a pool above the mill.

Because it was considered by such people to be "shocking," their belief was made public in all sorts of ways, that God's religion would be dragged down with him; and there seems no chance that such things will not always be believed. Ruy Lyle, as he lay dying there, could only feel

feel that Crispin Ken was quite the first to see through what he was.

The day came round, for the inquiry upon the death of the idiot child, to be concluded.

Mr. Lyle himself was much too ill to leave his bed, but the proceedings assumed the form of almost national importance.

The Calvinistic papers sent down their own reporters. Everything that the ingenuity of a disingenuous defence could do was done; and the gentleman who conducted it, applied the inevitable issue at the end, — “if the jury could find Mr. Lyle guilty ‘Evangelical religion’ in the country would have received a blow which might leave a scandal and a stain on the Christianity of the world.”

This climax was certainly rather a trial for “Evangelical Christianity;” and the hint that the catastrophe of Mr. Lyle’s character would have a generally prejudicial effect on Christianity, was just where this sort of belief only ceased to be ridiculous, and became serious; and it was almost

almost too much for the jury, who were afraid that the kind of Christianity they had been taught to think "safest," would come suddenly to an end in Mr. Lyle's conviction.

But there was no help for it. "Safe" Christianity would have to get over it as best it could, and Ruy Lyle, some time leader of "Evangelical Protestantism," was found guilty.

Of course, it was said that if he ever came to trial, the verdict would be very different to that. But Ruy Lyle never did come to trial here.

He was too ill to be removed, so he was suffered, till he should mend, to remain in his own home.

It was on the evening of the same day that Ruy Lyle sent down to the parsonage to say he should like to speak a little while with Crispin Ken.

Crispin went up at once, and found the man whose influence a few days before had been more or less felt through England, in close custody.

Crispin

Crispin could see the change as he came into the room. Ruy Lyle was but little likely to meet death, as people who had not been religious leaders, would. He was dying very well indeed, and giving very little trouble. His white hair looked even whiter than before, and his face, which had got thinner lately, carried in its every line that perfect chiselling, which had done something to get for the engraving that purported to represent it, a ready sale.

He turned as Crispin came to his side, and for a moment Crispin felt he could not wonder at the power of that smile.

"Sit down, Mr. Ken, I do not know that I have much to say; it is very good of you to come to me; could you take my hand? I know that once you did not like to take it."

Crispin took the thin hand, which almost seemed transparent, warmly.

"I don't think there are many that would do that, Mr. Ken. It's quite one thing to be what I was, and another to be what

what I am ; but that's what I wanted just to say. You never did believe I was what I seemed, and the world was not slow to call you 'uncharitable.' You were right, Mr. Ken — do not ask me why — that I have even told you this must be alone known to you ;" and Ruy Lyle spoke only in a whisper, lest those who were set by the law to watch him, should hear what he said.

"My life," he continued, "was a lie, before the world, but never, Mr. Ken, to you ; and there have been those here in this room to-night, who a week ago could think no ill of me ; and when I asked them as I asked you to take my hand, as if I was a thing they loathed, they held theirs back. I had some time been their idol — I had now become pollution. We must part now, Mr. Ken — part for ever. I know what you would say. I have said it — but when I took the faith I uttered in my mouth, before crowds of living men, I felt it was a lie — there is no hereafter, nothing but the grave, and dust, and worms.

worms. My father first taught me to believe there was no God, and struck me off my knees for ever saying, what my mother taught me as a prayer to say,— and I shall die——”

But Crispin held his hand before the lips of Ruy Lyle, and those words were never spoken.

It was morning when Crispin left, and he did not leave, till the prayer that Ruy Lyle’s own mother once had taught, was there rehearsed again, and in that mother’s prayer were Ruy Lyle’s last words lifted to heaven as his heart’s chord snapped.

And on a certain day “Evangelical Protestantism,” seriously, sat round a green baize board, to choose another leader.

CHAP. IX.

Ivy Thane.

EUBEN KEN had left his son some work to do. There are a good many clever "business-like" ways of filling up a church near London, which, in other parts, are not at all so possible. If the clergyman in charge in a metropolitan district—and the W.C. district is better at this than any other—has any remarkable faculty for emptying his church, a popular preacher, the nearer the regular thing the likelier, is made into "the Sunday morning lecturer," and has either so much a Sunday down—to find his own cab—or half what the pews fetch. Half what the pews fetch in a big church, is the best bargain for the preacher.

preacher. There is nothing to stop this sort of exhibition but good taste; and the best taste "sits under" the performer, so the general spectator is not likely to collapse about the scandal.

When Crispin Ken succeeded to the cure, his father's concessions were showing their sign. The church had long been very nearly empty. The clerk had been some time dead, and there was not sufficient excitement to create a successor; for the emoluments of the office were chiefly the importance it gave the holder of the trust.

Whilst there was no need for any excitement on this head, Crispin purposed that the church, if he could make it, should very soon be full. He did not think, with any self-sufficiency, that he could put down empty prejudices and fill an empty church of his own strength; but he somehow thought his father had not gone to work about it the right way.

He had invited his people, soon after his presentation to the cure, to meet him,

and when he had got them together, told them what he meant to do. Every one had been there to hear him. Mr. Lyle had been there. John Wycherley, who happened to have been a little better then, was there. The pawnbroker was there; but not with all the force he used to carry with him. He had given way to another, and that other one was there.

Silas Thane was at that time the leading speculator at the chapel. He had been reviling the Liturgy with plenty of chest over at Windermere; but the pawnbroker, beginning to fail in his throat, and hardly able to keep under the heresies about him, Silas Thane was bought off from his engagement at the Windermere meeting-house, and was procured at a sacrifice, by the trustees, for St. Hilda's chapel. He was a bookseller, who had got around him a tolerable trade besides his Sunday one, and then started a cheap lending library, where, like some others of his class, he did his best for the interests of schism.

Silas

Silas Thane was very little like the pawnbroker in his manner towards the church. He was at the beginning very civil to Crispin, and talked confidently of what "we" should do; as though the interests and objects of the Chapel and the Church were quite one.

Silas Thane was engaged to put down Crispin; for Crispin Ken was suspected of coming there even to carry out what he had subscribed to. Such a remarkable and uncommon peril to the Church must be met at once. "Evangelicalism" was looked to at that crisis, as it always is, as the chiefest hope; and the "Evangelicals" clustered up together, determining that if Crispin Ken fell short of their "views," they should support the ministry of the bookseller.

So Crispin Ken had met his people under some restraint. He did not want to alienate any, but he did not feel that the Liturgy was to be interpreted in this way or that, because this person or that did not like it all.

It will never be agreed how God is to be worshipped. Whether it is the fittest thing to say or sing a song; whether a hymn is the best in the throat of a counter tenor, or in the nose of a charity boy; whether it is most like popery to wear a black or a white gown; and Crispin's avowal, that he meant to do things decently, was accepted as a *casus belli* by the Dissenters and the "Evangelicals." Two gentlemen wrote a very descriptive letter to the editor of the *Record*, which that temperate and genial Protestant even caused to be printed, "Evangelical" christendom being so made to realise that Rome had her agent at St. Hilda's.

The agent took the construction very liberally. Few men ever went to their work more temperately or more heartily than Crispin Ken. He advanced nothing that could give to the enemies of the Church, within his cure, any tolerable cause to exclude themselves; but he abated nothing of the decency of God's worship in God's house.

Little

Little by little had his church begun to fill ; and the trustees of the chapel took it seriously into consideration, whether the bookseller had not been over-estimated.

And yet no one could be very well offended. Crispin had heard that “ Evangelicalism ” meant to make a great effort to brush him away ; but even “ Evangelicalism ” did not care to proceed to give its little liking form. There were two or three “ ministers ” had down from London, who preached in the chapel, which was to show that the “ Evangelical party ” has no foolish prejudices about unconsecrated buildings — more than, perhaps, was asked to prove so well received a matter.

But though Crispin Ken emptied the chapel and filled his church, this had not been easily done. The “ Evangelicals ” joined the Dissenters. There was not much to bridge over ; but they did come together. It became a question how the place was to be made too hot to hold any churchman, and the combination undertook to get all the necessary heat. Per-

haps the alliance at St. Hilda's, as elsewhere, was one that had long virtually existed, if only just then proclaimed.

Crispin Ken had seen what concession would attempt, and what it could carry.

Reuben Ken had lost his people by what is popularly called "acting in the spirit of true Christian concession." It is called "true Christian concession" to hide away your Prayer-book in the pocket of your coat when you meet a Dissenter on his way to chapel; to "say" the psalms if you are called upon to "act" in an "Evangelical" proprietary chapel; and to hang your altar with the most indifferent upholstery.

A clergyman has simply nothing left to his own discretion, whether the Liturgy is to be adapted to a great variety of tastes. It is the more certain that the betrayer of Church principles in these "safe" days means Church preferment — but you must first come through a deal of dirt to get it.

We do not all see alike what is black, or white, or clean, or foul. To some there might

might be even that worth living for, beyond what Exeter Hall itself could give or take away ; and you would never get an " Evangelical " proper to care for heaven, if you could make him quite believe, that he would ever sing there to a harp.

Crispin Ken, by what he did, lost none he would have kept had he followed one concession by another. But in what his father did, there was the witness that the Church could not abandon its faith in its own articles, and hold its own against dissent. The change he worked was admirably timed. He never went back. But the change was such that it only offended, where there was a unanimous intention to take offence. The better intentioned went with him ; and because it was seen that he had taken his own way, and kept it, the disappointed followed after, and amongst the first of these had been the bookseller's own daughter, Ivy Thane.

Silas Thane liked the thing his daughter did about as much as might be. People began to talk about it. Ivy Thane

only went with her father as far as the chapel door on Sundays, and then walked on by herself to church. It was rather thought by some that that preacher could not be so very strong, and could not have so much to say, that was well worth hearing, who could not over persuade his own child.

St. Hilda's had been some little time coming round to think, that there was a greater gap between schism and the Church, than the ministry of Reuben Ken had ever brought out; now that Ivy Thane herself had got a Prayer-book, there was no longer any doubt about it.

Silas Thane, in those moments when he could give himself up to concerns other than those which were entirely spiritual, had heard and seen something of this, and thought, as the minister of a chapel rather in debt, that he would put the scandal down. It was clear to him that Ivy was taking a good many with her, and if the chapel ceased to pay, he would have to cease to be a preacher in it; and the book-seller

seller quite thought the preaching admitted of this cautious view. So he was minded that he would not let Ivy go any more to church, or his own child would be his worst undoing.

He lay thinking of this one night in bed, and he purposed to have it out with her the next day.

Ivy Thane was but just twenty when her father came to "do" the schism of St. Hilda's. Her mother had been dead some two years or more, and from that time her father seemed to have her double love. It was hardly that Silas Thane was one who could be loved to any fancy length; but his child was not the one to see, in what he might fall short. She came to St. Hilda's, as much inclined as Silas was, to shut the church. But Ivy Thane, reared where dissent was a business, and its success a trade, had but little of the bitterness which bound her father. She had heard what Crispin Ken had had to say, when he told his people what he meant to do, and though Ivy Thane,

because she wanted to believe her father right, was a long time unconvinced, in the end she could not bring herself to think that Crispin Ken was wrong. She felt, that by her father, what she had done would be magnified into a crime. She could still make the buns and the tea for the chapel children that were good, but she could not somehow go to chapel any longer.

Crispin saw her at church; and Mona called on Ivy the next morning.

Silas Thane at first was sullen; then when the people began to point at Ivy, on her way to church, his lips opened, and what he said was rather highly seasoned for a preacher.

Silas Thane was always of opinion that he had an interest in Ivy other than that of being her father. Ivy had been ever beautiful a great way beyond what is often seen; and at twenty a rarer — because more simple — loveliness, had never held its own in any woman.

Her father had not at all undervalued
what

what her looks would do for him. He certainly wished she would dress a little better; and Ivy Thane, oftenest with nothing on her head, her hair falling wildly on her neck, was certainly too nearly like what God made her, to be like "the fashion."

Silas Thane had undertaken to refuse for her two or three sober young men, preachers themselves, but very far, indeed, below what he was in that line. He had believed it would be no very easy thing in that way to find her equal; but he happened to know two or three middle-aged men of lively means, who, he thought, might be got to look at Ivy, if Ivy could by any chance be tamed to look at them. And now he was told by those who knew where he was to be touched, that it was not quite the most delicate thing in the world for a young girl to be running after a curate—a curate, it was always added, who had nothing.

Whether it was not most delicate because the curate was not in funds, or
L 6 because

because he was a curate, or because of both, was not very easy to say. Silas Thane caught at it, and was quite sure it would be never said again; so he spoke to her about it the next day.

“Where are you going, Ivy?”

“I am going with Miss Ken to the schools.”

“Going with Miss Ken to the schools, eh? and I would rather that you didn’t, Ivy; there must have been something wrong in your bringing up. What have you got there?”

“It’s a Prayer-book, father.”

“A Prayer-book, is it? a device of the bishops; a thing with red-edged leaves; give the beastly thing to me, Ivy;” and he snatched it from her hands. “Oh, indeed, it’s come to this, has it?” and he read what was written in the book,—“Ivy Thane: from the Rev. Crispin Ken.” “I shall burn it, Ivy,” and he said this from the preacher’s point of view; “but it might be worth a few shillings with that writing out,” and he said this from the bookseller’s.

bookseller's. "Crispin Ken! if you would only wear your gown down to your feet, and wear something on your head, and look a little more like other people, it's not such as him that would be coming after you. I don't want to hear any answer; you will cease to know these Kens, and you will go to my chapel. There's ten more seats to let this morning: so much out of my pocket. It's all your doing; you're taking them over to the church—the church!—what *is* the church?—There, I don't want to know, I didn't ask; but I do not mean that you shall be running after Crispin Ken."

Ivy Thane said nothing; she knew she would take nothing by it if she did; but she was not going to defy her father, still, the little decent way he put it was almost over much for her to bear.

She wrote to Mona, who took counsel of Crispin; and, in the end, though Ivy Thane no longer went to church, she did not go to chapel.

Silas Thane went himself to Crispin,
with

with the "device of the bishop" in his hands.

"You gave this to my daughter, Mr. Ken?"

"I gave your daughter a Prayer-book, as I should any one who asked for one."

"Oh! indeed. She asked for one. Be good enough not to serve her fancy with another. It will only follow this into the fire. I have told her to-day there is to be an end of this nonsense; and we shall be likely to have words, Mr. Ken, if you drag my daughter to your church."

"I shall not drag your daughter anywhere, Mr. Thane, nor shall I encourage her to disobey you, if you have thought well to lay on her your command to keep away from church; and I shall further tell your daughter, that whilst her age permits the law to make you her guardian, she should not do what may offend you."

"*You* will tell her, Mr. Ken! You seem to be amazingly free with my child; know her age to a month. It won't do, Mr. Ken, so you'd as well give it up."

"Give

“Give what up, Mr. Thane?”

“Why, isn’t it very plain? What did you give her that book for? What do you know her age for? It’s just taking away my daughter’s name. It’s ——”

“You have been some time ungenerous, and now you are becoming gross. Ivy Thane ——”

“There it is again, Ivy! Who is Ivy? It’s pretty nearly time you were kept apart.”

“Your language, Mr. Thane, very little beseems what you are taken for here. I only called your daughter by the name she bears amongst us all. I did not invite her from your chapel. Your daughter asked to be a teacher at our schools; and I did not discourage her. When you add anything to this, it is your daughter’s name you would dishonour, not my intentions.”

“It’s all cursed well,” muttered Silas Thane to himself, as Crispin Ken walked away. “Ivy’s getting on for twenty-one; she’s clean gone over; there’s no mistake about it; but I must get her away before that.”

that. Ivy Thane! Ivy!" and bit by bit he tore the book that Crispin Ken had given her to pieces.

He had seen a hen hatch ducks, but the chapel's daughter should not give the steeple's son a bride.

CHAP. X.

The Fever.

T was not very strange that John Wycherley should be getting back his strength. He seemed again as he used to seem before that night when Ruy Lyle had mixed what Meg had called the "wine stuff." But the doctor, who rather liked to believe in human nature, could hardly yet realise that which had come out over the end of Ruy Lyle; and with the evidence of the cup that had been found in Meg's own house, he still suspected her, and after the funeral of Mr. Lyle, he took the first opportunity of expressing his belief to Crispin Ken.

"You have certainly such proof as there
may

may be on your side," said Crispin; "I do not see that there is any evidence as to who put the poison in the cup. I think this thing will only for a time lie dark."

"And yet," said the doctor, "she did not hesitate confessing to a crime as black."

"There is more in it than we know of yet; it is all very strange that Meg should have been his wife, and that he should have come to Mona with his love."

"It all seems the same again now that he is gone; there was something about him that left a shadow upon everything;" and the doctor as he said this, against the discipline he was under in such a matter, shuddered; and nothing more was said about it at the time.

The crown did not insist upon its prerogative, and the immense fortune of Ruy Lyle passed to his next of kin, Miss Strake.

It was some weeks later that that lady forwarded to Crispin Ken a parcel of clothing, which had been taken from the wardrobe

wardrobe of Mr. Lyle, for distribution amongst the poor of St. Hilda's; and on an early day the division of the clothes was made.

As he had not had time to see that there was nothing left by accident in any of the pockets, Crispin desired that everything found in them might be returned to him.

"Please, sir, I've just found this little bit of paper, which seems likely as though it had something in it. I thought I'd best bring it back;" and the man who had come to say this had had amongst his share a coat worn by Mr. Lyle for many weeks before his death. When the man who had brought it back was gone, Crispin put it unopened in his pocket, purposing to give it to Miss Strake that evening.

Crispin Ken was on his way to the Hall some time later, when he overtook the doctor, and having ascertained that he was on his way to see Miss Strake professionally — Miss Strake, believing she
had

had caught the nettle-rash, or some little disturbance to which the young are the most liable — Crispin asked him to deliver the paper packet. As it was put into the doctor's hands, an almost colourless powder poured out at one end where the paper had been torn. There was something about the smell of it which seemed familiar to them both, and Crispin, as a sudden thought seemed to strike him, gathered up such of the powder as he could, which had fallen upon the doctor's coat.

“You will explain to Miss Strake how this happened; but I think,” continued Crispin, “that there is in this an explanation of that which has caused a difference of opinion between us of late. The packet containing this powder was found in a coat lately worn by Mr. Lyle. We have found the cup in which, I think, it will be discovered that some of this was put; and, I believe, it will be seen that the poison in the cup and in this paper are not unlike. It will be remembered, too, that when the
woman

woman was seen with that cup in her hand, she was carrying it *away* from John Wycherley's bed. I need hardly ask you, for we are both equally concerned to trace this thing to its source, to have the powder referred to the same chemist who analysed what was in the cup."

"I do not think that it will be necessary," said the doctor, who had been examining the powder, "it is, beyond all doubt, some of that which was in the cup. I am afraid it is too sure that the hand of Mr. Lyle was in that crime, too — and yet what could have been the cause?"

"You do not think," said Crispin, "that it could then have been at all worth while getting rid of a man who had about an unencumbered 50*l.* a year; but there is more here than may, perhaps, be ever known; more to connect that woman with John Wycherley. I have some time suspected that there was that, which did not appear, in the strange attachment of that woman to that man."

"It has not escaped me," said the doctor,

tor, "what you mean, but I more particularly refer to the possibility in this country — where everybody's motives are everybody's property — of such a man, almost without a suspicion against him, being, throughout his career, the absolute head of a party in the religious world. He was a man whose name became identified with every movement, having a religious bearing, with which that party sympathised, for the last fifteen years. It is difficult to believe that such an one could reach to such an influence, without giving cause to the irreverent to congratulate themselves — religion cannot feel the stronger by the side of this man's grave."

"I think you are wrong," said Crispin, "but I think you will be wrong with about threefourths of society. Had suspicion never rested on him, religion would not have been the gainer; and with all the guilt that does rest now, it is not the loser. It took nothing by his professions; it has taken nothing by the commentary that his life supplied. He made religion
a trade;

a trade ; but those who may make his guilt an occasion for a sneer against religion, are simply those who would not have been convinced had his life been blameless. It is impossible not to believe that there are well meaning people, who will think the scandal against religion to be very great, for their faith is in those platform agencies, of which Ruy Lyle was so long the chief exponent. But as religion does not ask these agencies, neither, in the long run, need she fear them. I am glad, for the sake of Meg's still dishonoured memory, that the witness, which this powder gives us, has been found."

Later in the evening the packet was delivered to Miss Strake, the doctor not thinking it necessary to tell her how much its being found had added to her nephew's load of guilt.

Miss Strake only knew that, by the clemency of the crown, she was then enjoying—after the manner of a lady of middle age left a great many thousands of pounds—what that nephew had left behind.

hind. The money was hers, to do what she liked with. There was no one to leave it to; no one who would want her to die at their convenience; and as a maiden lady, of Miss Strake's age and upwards, is not peculiar in liking such a considerable power, it was generally held that her position had its advantages. The less worldly view was that it had great opportunities; but Miss Strake soon got to know that this view was represented to her from all sides, in company with a collecting card.

It would have been, perhaps, probable that Miss Strake should have committed herself to the party which had so long her nephew's confidence; and it did not arise out of any neglect on the part of that party, that Miss Strake's benevolence did not branch out entirely in that direction. But she had been once told by a gipsy, when she was quite a little girl — and to Miss Strake that seemed as yesterday — that she would marry a clergyman, and leave a long line. “Evangelical” charities were excellent

lent things; but Miss Strake did not desire to do anything that would prejudice the clergyman or the long line. She had kept more than forty birthdays when she thought of this.

During the summer months the health of John Wycherley was so far restored, that it was thought that the day for his marriage with Mona might be fixed. Nothing had as yet transpired to bring him before the world, as the son of the woman who had been known thereabouts as Meg. It had, indeed, at times, crossed the mind of the curate of St. Hilda's the less, that it would be satisfactory to himself to know who or what he was. His recollections of his mother were much too indistinct to afford him any clue. His allowance, whilst at college, had been furnished to him by one, who either knew nothing, or would tell him nothing, about who he was. Through the same agency John Wycherley had been enabled to accept the perpetual curacy of St. Hilda's the less; but since then he had accustomed

himself to believe that he was without a flesh belonging in the world ; and there was no clue, so far as had ever appeared, that would lead to the unravelling of the mystery of his birth—nothing, indeed—but a ring, in the inside of which had been engraved J.D.: this was given him on leaving college. It was a plain gold ring, which certainly betrayed nothing very deeply.

During the whole of his long illness, it could hardly be said that John Wycherley suspected what was at all the nature of it. Probably over no one was the influence of Ruy Lyle more marked than over Wycherley,—and it was an influence which Wycherley thought he ought to like, but which he could only come to dread.

There had been few hours in the day that Ruy Lyle was not by his bed-side, or when he was sometimes better, and went out to get the air, that Ruy Lyle was not by his side to take his arm ; and had it been any one but Mr. Lyle, Wycherley would have felt his presence to be unendurable.

He

He felt that it concerned him, more than in any way he dared to think, to keep that influence back ; but when Ruy Lyle came sometimes with the cup, though never seemingly for such a purpose, Wycherley felt that he *must* drink, although there was that which told him it was to his own undoing—how, he did not know. He looked at the world very differently to Crispin Ken. The devotion of such a man as Ruy Lyle seemed to him to bear but one interpretation, and he struggled against his own conviction to believe it could have any interest that was not pure. This had been the whole secret of the success of Ruy Lyle. However much you might suspect him, you only in the end came to feel yourself to blame for the suspicion ; and by his side, through days and nights, stood the woman who was called mad.

That she should care for him, as she had seemed to care, was something more than Wycherley could understand. She had only once appeared to turn her
M 2 thoughts

thoughts from his own sickness, and that was when he saw her kiss the ring he wore. He had asked her why she did it; but she only gave one of those wild answers which had lent something to the belief that she was mad. It had gone against him even to suspect her, when he was told to be suspicious, when he had seen her with the cup in her own hand, stealing silently across the room; but since his getting better he had thought no more of that night's short-lived fear.

In the autumn, John Wycherley and Mona Ken were married at the church of St. Hilda's the great. It was just what such a wedding should be—just what besecmed the taking of a woman who had nothing, by a man who had 50*l.* a year.

A few weeks later, John Wycherley was offered a curacy of some few pounds more value, in the south; and as it was remembered Mona was not strong, and was given to look hectic when the east wind blew through the opening in the hills, it was held to be only wise that it
should

should be accepted. So after that, Crispin Ken and Jack lived on alone.

Crispin Ken had not seen much of Ivy Thane for some time past. He missed her from her place at church ; but neither her father's sermons nor threats would get her to chapel. Indeed, Silas Thane began to think that Crispin Ken was a great way too strong for him. The seats did not let for what they used. For a commanding view of the preacher, prices had considerably fallen. Silas Thane did not understand this to be quite the legitimate end of his preaching. He had come there, thinking to be over much for Crispin Ken, and for a season Crispin found the dissenter supplying the commentary to Reuben's concessions.

But bit by bit the ground came back to Crispin. He set the Church before the people, so that they could see what it meant, and in what it differed from the Chapel; and the people saw the difference to be such that many of them followed Ivy Thane to church. But the dissenter

laid his command on Ivy never to speak to Crispin; and so long as she was, by reason of her age, under her father's will, she did not in any way defy him.

Crispin the while had no very great variety of friends. The doctor had succeeded to a considerable practice some ten miles off, and St. Hilda's was for a time dependent on his uncertain coming.

It was towards the end of the same winter, that a family came to live at the house which was once owned by Richard Ken. Crispin found them to be in every way desirable neighbours. Mr. Seton was a widower of large property, and had bought the house at St. Hilda's, chiefly for the sake of his daughter, an only child, who had been recommended by Saville Row to try the mountain air. Crispin had no cause to be dissatisfied with the recommendation. Florence Seton was a beautiful girl, scarcely then eighteen, and Crispin found that a general invitation to Mr. Seton's house was nothing but agreeable. Indeed, Florence soon took the
place

place that Ivy, but for her father, might have taken — yet there was nothing in common between the two. Florence Seton was very fair ; but the loveliness of Ivy Thane, in all its unspoiled wildness, was such, as by reason of the spread of schools and classes, is not often seen. It was very nearly as fresh as God had made it. Ivy had grown up in all her rare simplicity. Florence Seton had gone through a course of “finishing,” which had not been entirely without a result. It had done as little harm as it perhaps could do ; but Florence would have been so much the nearer what a woman was meant to be, without it.

As the days of the early spring went by, Crispin, whilst he saw the less of Ivy, saw the more of Florence Seton. Silas Thane about that time thought he could profitably dispose of his daughter to an elderly drysalter, who was reported to be very well to do. The difficulty was the necessary preparation on Ivy's part ; for the drysalter, with all that he had, had never

been greatly to the taste of any woman. But Silas Thane thought it to be without the prerogative of any woman who ever lived, to weigh what a man was when he was well to do; so he was at some pains to get Ivy to look more like what an elderly drysalter would care to be seen with. She must not go about without a hat, and she must wear her gowns a good deal longer, or the drysalter, who had been before so unsuccessful, and rather wanted courage, might be scared away.

Then the days came on when the spring had almost opened into summer. Jack was Crispin's chief care. Still the leg would not lengthen anything at all; and the many things which it was necessary Jack should have, to keep up any strength, took a good deal out of the very small income. The cripple did his work for what he took; and Crispin found that Jack could be of use in many ways.

That June had been the hottest one known for many years in England; and there had
been

been some few cases of malignant fever at St. Hilda's amongst the more crowded of the miners' cottages. But up to the end of July there were no symptoms of its spreading, and no case had ended fatally.

It was one morning, in the beginning of August, that Crispin heard of its having carried off one of the miners' children in the night; and, before the day was out, it was told about, almost in whispers, that there were many others dying. Within the next few days, the fever spread, as the heat grew, from house to house; and there was hardly one home between those hills that had not death within. The irregular coming of the doctor made things worse, and before the week was out, St. Hilda's, from one end to the other, was a stricken spot. Crispin had often six funerals a day; then the mortality so much increased, that it was necessary to bury the dead at night. Ivy Thane had taken it amongst the first, and was for some time between life and death; but she had had the strength to throw it off. Mr. Seton, on the first out-

M 5

break

break of the fever, had removed with his daughter, and had insisted on taking Jack with them. Crispin, very soon, never went to bed at all. He had the work of both the doctor and the priest to do ; and this went on, the rather getting worse, till the middle of September. The struggle now, as the scourge abated nothing, was very hard to bear. The unceasing calls on the little that he had, were almost bringing Crispin Ken to want ; and it was not the least of his troubles that he must disguise it. Any seeming of despair in him would have crushed out hope, in almost every home within his cure ; and when the fever had sometime passed the worst, and the funerals had fallen to one a day, Crispin took the fever.

It was on the Friday morning that he first fell ill. He was alone in the house ; but he fought against the heat that was upon him. His great natural strength of constitution enabled him to throw it off easily ; but able once more to settle to his work, it was with a weakness that
he

he could not conceal from himself, and with a front of want to face that he could not disguise.

It had been a time at St. Hilda's almost without parallel. A third of the souls within the cure had died and been buried. Some by the hot sun's glare, some by a lantern's light. Women had been seen with the dead at their breast, hurrying to the mound that covered the head of that other one, whose lying there had first struck to that mother's reason; and when the fever, too, was dying out, Crispin looked around at what was left him.

It wanted still some weeks to the day when another pound was possible; what he had left he divided out as far as it would go. He had only bread to live on. A little later he spent his all upon a roll. The next day was the Sunday. Crispin went to church, and no food had passed his lips. It was a thanksgiving day to those who were left. His strength, which had been tried to the last point, carried him through; but it would not carry him
M 6 beyond

beyond. His people met him in the churchyard—those of his people who were left—and he staggered on, and could hardly give back the smiles which spoke to him from side to side. To have stayed there would have been to have fallen down amidst those graves that were so new.

He reached his home, and never in after years could he at all tell how. It was the hunger, then, that must be met. He could have torn, and so divided out, till it should last no more, the fevered skin that hung upon him. He did not want to beg; but it had come to that now, and he would have gone out then and begged—he had not liked to think from whom—when he thought he heard a voice outside the door. He had tried to move to see who knocked, but as his hand first touched the latch, the last belonging of his strength gave way.

Ivy Thane was kneeling by his side, and leaning over him, when he opened his eyes late in the afternoon.

“You

"You are better, Mr. Ken ; but you ought not, whilst you are so weak, live here alone."

"Do I seem weak, Ivy?—Stay—stay—don't go ; don't tell any one what I shall say, not your father, Ivy,—”and as he spoke he took her hand. “I am starving, Ivy—anything—a bit of bread will do ; but it must be now—now ! This is very kind of you, Ivy—no—no. What am I doing? You must not stay ! Were your father to hear of this, all his anger would be visited on you.”

“And I could bear more than he has to heap upon me, Crispin. Oh ! don't send me away.”

“It is not right that you stop here, Ivy. If people should hear of it, they would talk, they——”

“Then I will stay, Mr. Ken, if that's all. I don't mind that a bit.”

“You called me ‘Crispin’ just now, Ivy. Don't call me ‘Mr. Ken’ again, but you should not stay ; for me you must not risk your father's anger.”

“I

"I will only go, Mr. Ken, to——"

"No! no! Ivy. I'm not 'Mr. Ken' to you."

"Well, then, Crispin, to get you something that will make you strong again;" and she gave him her hand to lead him to a chair.

"You'll be back directly, you will, will you? Back directly, eh? Really, Mr. Ken, may I ask what this means?"

"I will answer that, father. I saw as Cris—as Mr. Ken came through the churchyard this morning——"

"What business had you there at all?"

"That he was looking very ill, so I did not think there would be much harm in coming here to see him."

"Not much harm to come to see a man sprawling here upon the floor, as he was when I first came in. Haven't I told you that I won't permit it? You've done mischief enough already; do you want me to curse you?"

"No, father, you know I don't want you to do that. I minded everything you
said,

said, so long as you had any right to tell me what I ought to do ; but I may do something now that *I* think is right ;” and Silas Thane knew how Ivy meant that by law she was no longer under him.

“ Then you defy me, Ivy ? ”

“ No, father, no ! You must not call it that ; I only —— ”

“ I will call it what I please. Let go my child’s hand,—let go her hand, Mr. Ken.”

“ Ivy, you had better go,” said Crispin.

“ Mr. Ken, I have before had occasion to speak of your familiarity towards my daughter ; her name —— ”

“ Is what your daughter sanctions, Mr. Thane.”

“ And you permit this, Ivy ? ”

“ Crispin may call me Ivy, father, if he likes.”

“ Crispin ! Will you have me, Ivy, tell you now what you are —— ”

“ Not in this house, Mr. Thane,” said Crispin, gathering up the little strength that still stayed in him ; “ if you do not
know

know what is due to your daughter, I know what is due to a lady—I shall protect her here.”

“Then you may protect her till it pleases you to cast her off; and I take it that is likely to be soon, for her home is never in my house again.”

“Then, father, it must be so. You have gone beyond your right to speak those words,”—and as she said that, the door had closed upon the curse of Silas Thane.

“Could you, Ivy, take the emptiness that you have found *here* for a home?”

And as she moved to go, and dropped his hand, her smile, to Crispin Ken, was something even sweeter than the spoken word he asked for.

CHAP. XI.

The Dissenter's Daughter.

MISS STRAKE, within easy sight of fifty, wondered at the want of judgment in Great Britain. She could well understand that she was not light enough for a Frenchman ; and went in too much fear of the water ever to be carried away in the stern of a gondola by a modern Venetian ; but Miss Strake was amazed, so far as it was feminine, that she was not sought out by an Englishman.

Miss Strake still thought herself to be young enough not to be hopelessly overlooked ; and when she went about with her flap hat and general innocence of seeming, she felt her bones ache, perhaps a little, over her many girlish ways. But Miss Strake,

Strake, to herself, was of opinion that she was now not one day too young to marry. Miss Strake had had a little property of her own, enough to give herself every moderate opportunity of securing attention, and to bring one silk dress within her reach every quarter, taken out of the shop window, where it had been marked "very elegant," with a little abatement of colour and price, from the long duty it had done. But that was never evident, even to those friends who are generally abundantly able to find out such things.

Miss Strake, in looking back, could not at all satisfy herself that she had succeeded. A woman may very often reach any earthly honour, and even be asked by an "Evangelical" curate to accept the dedication of some pleasing novelty or other in chapel harmony, and yet feel that she has run her course to waste.

The age has hardly been defined when many women cease to believe in this; and Miss Strake's faith was by no means an isolated one.

The

The great end of modern education is, that a woman may "marry well;" of course the interpretation of this is not necessarily very limited. A woman who has married a curate, is invariably considered to have "married well." No one ever even seems to think about money, when a curate wants your daughter.

There can be no sort of harm in a woman having a strong leaning in favour of the curate interest; and the power peculiar to young priests, is, perhaps, in the main, exercised for the best. The situation is one which admits of very considerable attention. A curate's mission invites co-operation; and when you send him a sermon case of velvet, or a pair of bands through the post, it is pleasant to believe that you have done so much for the Church. It is not in the least necessary to notice how irreverent friends might put the gift. Jaundiced people may observe that all curates are not always irreproachable; but the tendency of the age is eminently favourable to your marrying
your

your serious girls off to sober young men of about twenty-six, in holy orders. The tendency may be, of course, sometimes less religious than it seems; but it has come to this, that your daughter, who does not marry a curate, is liable to the imputation of not having "married well."

The whole order of curates may be said to have a general interest in the young ladies' schools throughout the country; and really the curates, who never throw away a word upon such soil, might turn this to some account.

A woman is taught everything necessary to society, which may be very well if she has ultimately to come down to an unconsecrated field for choice, and have to condescend to a barrister, or an attorney, or it may even be a man who writes; but it is only very savage critics who will say, that to know everything necessary to society is the best preparation for becoming certain curates' wives.

Of course fancy work should be exceptionally encouraged. It should be confined

fined to stoles and bands, and the vestments which lead to so much "Protestant spirit" in this world. But the preparation should be a thought less of the kind it often is. Woman should be educated up to that standard, where perpetual reverence and a perpetual curate may be attained. Should the curate be better suited elsewhere, and at times he is liable to cast about and see what is the best he can do for himself, it is easy to fall back on dancing, and German, and the sallow cousin the cornet.

It is not desirable to discourage the belief in curates. If they sometimes represent affectation and levity, it is well that we should be occasionally reminded, that those who have extraordinary opportunities, are, after all, in some respects, like other men. It is well for the Church that fathers are, in the main, favourably disposed to curates; any over worship in this direction will cure itself: it is simply a reaction, brought about by too much waltzing in the mess-rooms, when our grandmothers were girls.

Miss

Miss Strake, from the time when it was held that school could do nothing more for her, had satisfied herself that she should like to marry a clergyman. Miss Strake was what is called "enthusiastic"—a very fearful and alarming appearance, as it is generally understood.

It is a great pity, for the sake of those of the clergy whose labour is the reality of devoted work, that many, fresh from the bishop's hands, so little remember what their behaviour should be. It simply gives occasion, for those waiting the opportunity, to bring the curate before the world, looking really very like another man. It is a bad thing to see those holding such a commission insincere or flippant, and it is worse to see them both. But it is chiefly grievous, not because it shows what the Church can stand, but because the ambition of some men to get themselves garnished at the hands of silly women, is an illustration not only to be found in a "funny" paper, but that may be found too often in the world.

Miss

Miss Strake understood it to be the right thing to marry a curate ; and through a great variety of disappointments she held to this faith ; but it was no matter to her whether the curate she fancied might be sober or frivolous. She had at one time thought of inclining towards an elderly clergyman ; but he had been carried off before the matter could be further matured.

Up to the time of the death of Mr. Lyle, Miss Strake did not consider herself to be beyond the possibility of securing the affections of something young. Miss Strake was sufficiently near fifty to have caught some of the distinguishing shadows of that age ; but, in consequence of the belief to which she clung, she still asked, when she went to visit her friends who lived near a wood, on which of the trees the nightingales sung ; and she did not yet wear caps, or even symptoms of them in lace, on her back hair.

Upon Mr. Lyle's death, she had succeeded, by the indulgence of the crown, to an estate and to a property which
would

would have made marriage possible with almost anybody, — even with a cap ; and Miss Strake began to receive a good deal of sudden attention. But its suddenness did not deceive Miss Strake.

As a woman, who had continuously hoped much, she knew what it meant ; and as she had borne her disappointments hitherto so well, she fancied she knew what was due to her dignity.

Miss Strake was an object of constant competition ; and she dealt with the rivalry in a manner that brought her the most satisfaction. She gave every one the opportunity of believing that she was favourable to their attentions, and then set them aside when they had begun to have hope. Mankind, collectively, had undervalued her for almost half a century ; and this was Miss Strake's revenge. But she had some time felt, that if there was a limit to the age when a woman may feel, that one man is suited to her rather than another,—she had not found out that limit yet.

Miss Strake's heart was entirely disposed



posed towards Crispin Ken. She felt that in this matter she was not mistress of those unaccountable influences which throbbed in her left side about the time of the death of Mr. Lyle. But with the fortune that that death had brought her, she no longer conceived that the disparity in age was anything. It has not been ascertained when a woman does feel, that this disparity has been attained; but Miss Strake, without any evidence of her feelings, that were not outwardly strictly feminine, satisfied herself that her heart was with the image of Crispin Ken.

The line that Miss Strake took, was the one most likely to be misconceived to her own advantage.

She became "enthusiastic." Wherever Crispin's work lay, there were Miss Strake's energies laid out. She insisted on taking a class at the schools. She offered to enlarge his church to any size he pleased. She was always in her pew, taking notes of the sermon, which she afterwards recopied, with the powerful

addition of her own commentary. She always wore her hat when she was likely to meet him; and when the fever broke out, Crispin Ken could but feel that her services were not contemptible.

It was to Miss Strake he went, the afternoon that Silas Thane cast off Ivy; and without explaining the circumstances, that made it necessary for him to ask her hospitality for another, he begged the protection of her roof for the dissenter's daughter, whilst the fever lasted.

Miss Strake was glad that Crispin Ken should be beholden to her for anything. She liked his having come to her. She suspected nothing at the time; she even suspected that Crispin Ken would come again, much in that sort of way, to ask for her own self; but Miss Strake had reason soon to think that she was wrong.

Silas Thane had certainly contrived for Crispin Ken, that which was in a measure rather hard; for the curate felt that, until Ivy Thane should become his wife, he might be something put to it to find for
her

her a home. The more charitable people would be putting those constructions on the nature of his engagement with the dissenter's daughter, which are never so various and so striking under the management of any but these charitable people. It was considered a bad sign that Crispin should care very little for whatever might be said of him, by people who could raise up or pull down character at pleasure. But it was necessary for Ivy that there should be no occasion for the "charitable" to create capital; and late in the afternoon of the day that Silas Thane cast off his daughter, Crispin had to find a home for Ivy.

It would have been easy to have compelled the dissenter to take her back; but Crispin did not mean to touch that alternative, as it would give the parish something to talk about, and it would be made a question between the church and the chapel.

Crispin Ken had first determined that he would give up the Parsonage to Ivy,
N 2
and

and ask the hospitality of the curate of St. Hilda's the less for himself, but that would have placed Ivy under the necessity of living alone. So Crispin made up his mind to invite the aid of Miss Strake.

Miss Strake, he conceived to be of that age when it came within her province to watch very jealously the attention which the world might offer to a younger woman. Crispin Ken calculated that Miss Strake might be about the age, when a single woman begins to read everything, that was ever written, to take a morbid view of mankind. Mankind had neglected her, and she would be entering into the spirit of depreciation that was evidenced in such literature. But if Miss Strake thought ill of men generally, she did not despair of finding some exception to redeem the kind.

So Crispin found her in every way accessible, and putting down everything that happened about twenty years before, as an affair of yesterday. Miss Strake was dressed to look very young, and certainly the
dress

dress could not be fairly associated with any of the blame of failure.

"I fear I am taking a great liberty, Miss Strake; but I hope I have sufficient reason for asking you to permit Ivy—Miss Thane—for the present to consider this house her home. There are——"

"Not another word if you please, Mr. Ken. Ivy is a sweet girl, and she will be like a sister to me."

"It is an intrusion, I am afraid, Miss Strake that——"

"We are old friends, Mr. Ken, and the young should not stand upon ceremony; it is time for that when we get elderly folks, Mr. Ken. I shall not inquire anything about it; Ivy will be asked no questions; I dare say we shall be very good friends; for you know we girls soon understand each other:" and as Miss Strake spoke, she took up her flap hat, feeling that for a maiden she had been long enough alone with Crispin Ken.

Here was something taken off the mind of Crispin. There is hardly anything more

hard to understand, and that calls for more delicate treatment, than the not uncommon belief of a middle-aged woman in her being young.

Miss Strake had come into the world late in her mother's life, and that mother was about eighty when she died. But Miss Strake called the old lady still "Mamma."

Other than this Crispin was satisfied with the home he had found for Ivy, and as he left the Hall and was returning to the Parsonage, he met her by the way.

In the evening Ivy Thane arrived, and was met by Miss Strake with all the signs of her serviceable affection, that most women seem well able to offer to each other, almost as soon as they have taken an inventory of what each is wearing.

"I am so pleased to see you, dear Miss Thane. It is very kind of Mr. Ken to think of me. Ah! dear, it was enough that *he* should have come to ask it. Mr. Ken is a delightful minister, Miss Thane."

"I

"I am sorry it should have been necessary, Miss Strake, for Mr. Ken to come here at all to trouble you. My father spoke in haste, and I am sure he will soon see that he was wrong."

You know, Miss Thane—but I must call you Ivy—you know, dear Ivy, Mr. Ken and I are quite old friends; he has done a great deal for St. Hildas. For some time past we have been always spoken of together; but what am I saying? My foolish, foolish heart!" and Miss Strake beat chidingly upon her left side.

"I hope you will come and stay with us sometimes, Miss Strake; we shall be very glad, I'm sure, to see you."

"I do not quite understand you, Miss Thane," said Miss Strake, in a tone of voice that acquired some twenty years of age in a minute.

"Oh, didn't Cris—Mr. Ken, tell you, Miss Strake, that we are—are going to be married, and that was why my father turned me away to-day; but I hope I have not done wrong in telling you?"

"You have done the very least you could; it was due to me, Miss Thane, that I should know it. I do not suppose *he* meant that I should though. I hope he won't deceive you, poor girl, as he has me. I had so little experience, and he took advantage of it."

"*You*, Miss Strake! Mr. Ken deceive you? I'm sure he never meant to do it; he thought it so motherly of you to take me."

"You will be good enough, Miss Thane, to spare my feelings, even if *he* has not. I do not say that in words he lead me to believe anything, but I believed him to be what he seemed. The young, Miss Thane, are easily deceived; our naughty hearts mislead us. I have the world before me, and I pray I may have strength to overcome it. Never, dear girl, say another word about it; you will think what my poor heart has had to bear."

"No, Miss Strake, what you have told to me cannot rest here. If Mr. Ken has
been

been false to you as you have said, I will know it now — this night ; and I will give him back his love ; but until he tells me that himself, I will not think that it is true.”

“ Dear girl, I am the most to blame ; perhaps his manner did not mean so much ; but it *was* said, Miss Thane, just before the fever began, that Miss Seton was going to marry Mr. Ken. These rumours though are never much to be depended on.”

Miss Strake looked on and saw how this worked ; and was satisfied with the action of her words. She had been heard to say, when a good deal younger, that whenever she could introduce in conversation that which it was hard for those to whom she spoke to bear, she always did it.

“ Musn’t the world be very fond of these rumours, Miss Strake, for there to be so many of them ? I wish you hadn’t told me anything about it ; I don’t believe it, but ——”

“There! there! dear girl, I thought I was only saying what you knew; you musn’t, indeed, take all you hear to heart. Miss Seton is a beautiful girl, and has fortune, and people *have* talked; that’s all. She is a sweet girl, they say; do you know her, dear Ivy?”

“She is very beautiful, indeed, Miss Strake, but I don’t believe it of him; don’t say anything more. I know you don’t mean it; but you make me feel what I do not want to feel.”

Miss Strake, after what she had said, was content to satisfy Ivy that there was no occasion to believe anything; and when she had seen her to her room, she sat down to think what further business might be done upon the morrow.

Miss Strake felt that she had started a suspicion in the heart of Ivy Thane which might be left to itself to work out there. But for the next day she purposed to work upon the dissenter himself, and to help him to learn a little of the scandal concerning Crispin, which she thought
might

might make him fear its effect upon his chapel. Then, too, there was Miss Seton. It would be the business of Miss Strake to tell Miss Seton, what it was evidently hoped might for the present be a secret, and Miss Strake believed that this would fire the — on the whole — rather lengthy train.

Nor was she very wrong, as to the effect it would have on Miss Seton.

Florence Seton had been bred in London, and came from the conventionalities of society to the hills of Cumberland. She had not found all knowledge of Crispin Ken to be disagreeable. Florence Seton went in earnest into everything she did, and there was nothing open to the reproach of being unfeminine in her enthusiasm.

She began to feel an interest in what Crispin might do. It was all new to her, and before so very long, the interest, perhaps, extended to Crispin himself. Before the fever broke out, they were often thrown

N 6

together,

together, and she heard, as it was intended she should hear, that their names were very often mingled.

Florence Seton, if she could not hear this without a blush—for she was not wholly sorry to hear it—had no cause to blush, for any share that she had had in giving foundation to what was said. She had gone to the work that St. Hilda's offered, without any thought of what might come of it as regarded Crispin; but she felt that his society did not certainly prevent her going on; and then she heard what she had hardly liked to put to herself, his name with hers. They sounded very well together. Florence Seton kept to herself her own thoughts; and her manner towards Crispin, was just what that of a woman so circumstanced should always be.

The next morning Miss Strake early gave herself up to that purpose on which she was bent.

She found Silas Thane at home, and managed, without in any way betraying what her own feelings were, to set the
matter

matter before him in the light of a great peril to his chapel.

The dissenter, who had sometime believed that he could see through everybody, was some way from seeing through Miss Strake, and perhaps on that occasion it was not inexcusable.

It was not entirely remarkable, that Silas Thane should not have busied himself to think about Miss Strake being a fitting bride for Crispin Ken. And after she had done all she needed to do there, she went on to Miss Seton.

"You can't tell what a surprise it was to me, my dear Miss Seton, to hear that Mr. Ken was going to be married. I thought, as I was passing by, I——"

"There is really some mistake, Miss Strake."

"Oh! no, I can assure you it's all settled; and it certainly is very strange that the curate should marry the dissenter's daughter."

"Marry! I did not exactly——"

"Oh! yes. I thought it would be a surprise

prise to *you*, Miss Seton ; but I will not stay. I only thought you might like to hear the news."

Miss Strake was sufficiently well pleased with what she had done that morning ; and what she had done went on working for some days, exactly as she thought it would, until at last it reached the ears of Crispin Ken.

Apart from feeling his own conscience in the matter to be perfectly clear, he felt it was due to the office he held that there should be an end to the scandal, which he had done so little to sow, in the place. Silas Thane he knew would not meet him, but on the next Wednesday morning, coming out of church, he met Miss Seton and her father, and Miss Strake.

" One minute if you please, Miss Strake ; you have thought it well to be very busy with my name, and to introduce it in a manner that must be to the prejudice of this lady ; Mr. Seton, Miss Strake will explain her reason for the freedom with which she has spoken of your daughter."

" I

"I am sure I have said nothing, Mr. Ken ; I am always so particular, am I not, dear Ivy?" she added, turning to Ivy Thane, who had just joined them.

"You told me yourself, Miss Strake, that Mr. Ken had first deceived you, and then Miss Seton."

"My dear girl, what a pretty little story this is to get a laugh against me. Ha! ha! I see it's all a joke—naughty, naughty man, Mr. Ken."

"Pardon me, Miss Strake, you have been at some pains to make it too serious for joking. I must ask you before Mr. Seton, his daughter, and Miss Thane, to withdraw everything that you have said."

"Well, well, Mr. Ken, don't be so serious about it. I did not mean any harm if I did fib a little. We girls, you know, must have our fun."

Crispin Ken had had enough of so much that was vulgar, behind so much that wanted to seem young—but Ivy Thane was now without a home again.

"Papa, will you ask Miss Thane to stop
with

with us till her marriage?" said Florence Seton from her woman's heart; and that day Mr. Seton did ask; and Ivy Thane, it came be arranged, was to be married from the house of Mr. Seton.

Silas Thane heard of what grew more than likely, and aloud said nothing. He felt his occupation there was gone; what he feared would be, was very near—the chapel's daughter was to be the steeple's bride.

CHAP. XII.

Windermere.

RISPIN KEN was to take Ivy Thane to his own home, when the next spring should come round. Ivy was well cared for at Mr. Seton's, and Crispin, till his marriage, lived on with Jack at the Parsonage alone.

Jack had been sometime getting worse, and his foot was further from the ground than ever. The doctor said that nothing would bring it to the earth but living well; and all that sixty pounds a year could do was done.

Other than this, Crispin Ken had no great trouble. His parish was no longer what it used to be. His church was full.

His

His people had sometime begun to see that there really might be an appreciable difference between the church and the meeting-house ; and it had been the work of Reuben Ken to show that there was about as little as could be. There were even the decencies of public worship ; and Crispin Ken was not suspected, even by the superstitious, of being any more an emissary of the Vatican.

Silas Thane, indeed, still held on to the chapel ; but there were seats to let in the best places ; and it was understood that he only stayed because the trustees held him for an unexpired term.

Crispin Ken did not expect ever to get all those who went to chapel ; but he had gone to his work hopefully to reclaim what his father had lost. He had pushed nothing, so that it should seem like pushing ; but he had conceded nothing that the letter of his office delegated to him ; and there is a great deal in holding to a purpose at the fitting time.

It is not uncommon to find a tolerably
well-

well-meaning man setting his parish by the ears, not by what he does, but by the way in which he does it. Perhaps he knows something of the Fathers, and generally may have learnt something; then every time he opens his mouth he grievously offends those who read the *Record*.

Those many over-wrought people, who fancy they could conduct a second Reformation with considerable success, go about saying that the sympathies of a man, who is not of what is called the Protestant platform, have on them the mark of the beast. There is nothing to be done under such an imputation. That which is farthest from the truth is very certain to be the nearest to general belief; and the extinction of a party might be involved in the declaration that that which is nearest to the ignorance of Geneva, is not the farthest from the fanaticism of Rome.

But Crispin Ken had so far asserted the right principle at the right time, that the people set aside their latitudinarianism, and forgot to be indifferent.

The

The avoidance of a constant parade of authority does not necessitate a perpetual apology for a clergyman's office.

Crispin Ken had conceded nothing — that his office imposed on him to hold to — that was clamoured for, and he had emptied the chapel. The intention might very well have been as good, and yet the issue not successful.

It had been the business of his father's life to make everything pleasant. If the "Evangelical" did not like a cross outside the buns upon Good Friday, there was no reason why his conscience should have to bear such agony in the design of a baker. It was Reuben Ken's belief, that in the interest of the church, no principle should be enforced, which could give offence to any one; and in the end there were no principles left at all, and the church was not the gainer; no one gained but the trustees of the chapel.

Reuben Ken had conceded everything — and had lost his people. Crispin Ken had conceded nothing which he had no
authority

authority to concede, and yet had brought them back. They were both set to do the same thing. Both with the same power, neither sanctioned to abate anything; both with one authority; and yet of one it would be the right thing to say that he was "strictly evangelical;" and of the other it would be popular to say that he had "extreme views." But Crispin Ken was not any the more always airing his office. It was the attitude so hard to find that he had learnt to keep.

By comparison with such a man as Ruy Lyle, Crispin Ken would suffer a great deal. His life would not be much worth telling. He would be held to have done very little for religion, and nothing at all for Protestantism. The platform is the only guarantee for piety; and place the life of Crispin Ken side by side with the career of such a man as Ruy Lyle; and side by side in many couples they do now stand over wherever the reality of that which is unaffectedly religious stands side by side with that which is its caricature,

cature, and the caricature will furnish some three volumes, and the reality about one sneer.

But Silas Thane did not see the emptiness within his chapel walls, without casting about for a last endeavour to put down Crispin Ken; but it all came to nothing. People had begun to ask what brought him there, and Silas Thane did not like his business interfered with. So long as he was asked no questions, he had done very well; so long as a man who made preaching a trade went unchallenged, it was not so hard for him to do well on it. But he could not get over what his daughter meant to do; and when he thought of this, he was more hardly inclined towards Crispin than a preacher should have been.

Crispin Ken had succeeded in his parish better than he ever thought he should. His people had been told that he carried somewhere about him the mark of the beast; and those who were the more easily persuaded, and wondered if the mark would
always

always leave a scar, for some time expected to see him followed by that which went upon four legs. But after a while they even believed that Crispin Ken might very possibly be met unaccompanied.

He did his work without any affectation of what he was not, and without any desire to explain away what he was; and after it was seen that this did not even mean going to Rome, his parish had faith to gather round him; and no one wondered then if the beast, that it was said had left its mark upon him, was muzzled.

As time went on the memory of Ruy Lyle began to die away. Some of the very "Evangelical" party, who still professed to believe they thought that he had been hounded to his grave by "High Church malevolence," met, and seriously discussed the possibility of giving him a public tomb; but the agitation relieved itself in two or three resolutions; and nothing but some dandelion roots that would not flower, marked the place where Ruy Lyle was laid.

Crispin

Crispin Ken could not always keep back an unwilling shudder, when he thought of the man whose influence for the time had been in its way paramount; and he could not rest whilst there was yet any guilt above Meg's grave. It was hard to move against her own confession; still Crispin Ken worked on, and by accident, it almost seemed, that what he had so long believed in came to light.

The cottage in which Meg had lived, had remained unlet since her death. There was a belief amongst those, who might otherwise have been likely to take it, that her own wild ways still haunted the little room to which her body had been taken, after it had been found below the race; and with a very little encouragement there were those who affirmed very seriously, that they had heard strange sounds there any time after nightfall. So, although the rent was made nominal to do away with these fancies, the little cottage stood untenanted.

After a while some one whose superstition

tion might have been equal to that of any one else, but whose liking for a low rent prevailed above the fear of any ghostly sounds at any season, took it for a year on trial, subject to the option of instant removal, if he felt himself subjected to supernatural liberties at night.

The place had been fast falling into ruin, and the owner was glad, for the sake of his own interest, to put it into tenantable repair.

Whilst the workmen were in one of the rooms, that had been but little used during the lifetime of any one then living, they came upon a cupboard, the existence of which was not even known to the owner. It was broken open, and a box, lying at the furthest corner, came to light.

It had evidently not lain there long, and when the lock had been taken off, two papers were found.

One proved to be the will of Phineas Aird, of comparatively recent date, and the other bore the signature of Helen Lyle.

They were brought, exactly as they were
VOL. II. o found,

found, to the landlord of the cottage, who, not well knowing whom he could better consult with on such a matter, took them at once to Crispin Ken.

Crispin was soon satisfied of their significance.

The will, under the hand and seal of Phinehas Aird, was explained by that paper, which had been found with it, and the only construction they could bear was, that the woman who had passed in that village as a worn-out servant of Mr. Lyle's, and had been better known as Mad Meg, was not only, as she herself had witnessed just before her own death, the wife of Ruy Lyle, but the mother of the late curate of St. Hilda's the less, who administered the cure as John Wycherley, and who, it seemed, was her son, John Dryden, by her first husband, one Oswald Dryden.

If this were really so, and the will was genuine, it was clear enough to Crispin that this John Dryden, his own sister's husband, was the lawful inheritor of all that was now enjoyed by Miss Strake.

The

The will of Phinehas Aird left everything unconditionally to Ruy Lyle and Helen, his wife, to be mutually enjoyed by them during their lives, and after the death of the survivor it was to go to any child of their marriage ; and contingent on their not leaving issue, to revert to John Dryden, the child (if living) of Helen Lyle, by her former husband, Oswald Dryden. This child, it went on to say, being then known by the name of John Wycherley.

This will, it was sufficiently explained in the paper writing found with it, traced out by Meg's own hand, was made, as has been already said, during the absence of Ruy Lyle, not many hours before the death of Phinehas Aird.

It declared, that so long as she lived, by reason of her own supposed crime, she was powerless to assert either that there was such a will, or what was the right of her son.

It seemed to have been Meg's intention, however, to have made this known before her death, but that she was prevented,

from the strong feeling which threatened her at the inquest. Had she ever spoken during the lifetime of Ruy Lyle, he would have charged her with the death of her own father. But beyond this, which might not by itself have been availing with her, the influence of that man, through all that had gone by, still stayed with her, after some sort, even to the last. She felt that his was the cursed hand that put death into the cup that her own son drank ; but to give up him, to drag that man before the world as what he was, her love, which had outlived his hate, still kept her back from doing.

Cast off, she still clung to the power that cast her off; and she had to live between the double agony of telling out the guilt of her own husband, or of seeing her own son die by that husband's hand ; and all this was told, as her heart threw up the words, in the written record Meg had left behind.

Nor did it seem at all to be the record of a woman who was very mad.

Crispin,

Crispin, when he had read it all, left word with Jack that he might not be back that night, and took the papers over to an attorney whom he knew at Windermere.

As Crispin Ken had from the first suspected, there seemed but little doubt that the will was genuine, and that what it declared was true.

John Wycherley was written to, and everything done in proper form, to give effect to his long-delayed right. Crispin Ken himself called upon Miss Strake, who began by announcing herself to be unequal to business; perhaps she might learn some day, but there was plenty of time for that.

Though her childish *naïveté* very persistently took one side, she said she wanted to do what was right and just; but she desired, as far as possible, that that might agree with her keeping the money.

Neither Crispin, nor his sister's husband, wished to treat her at all harshly, or

to let her feel the depth of her fall ; but Miss Strake gave as much trouble as a person so young in the ways of the world could, and yielded nothing that she was not forced to yield.

It has been told that the will was a good one, and so it was held to be by those who were chiefly concerned to prove it so.

But perhaps, amidst the joy that had opened up, there was nothing to John Dryden like that which he could feel as he stood by his mother's grave, and feel that the guilt of another's blood was not a stain upon her memory.

The evidence which brought so much to light, discovered that Phinehas Aird had died from natural causes.

The doctor very well remembered the night, when he had ordered that Phinehas Aird should have a sleeping draught. He had come back and found the dying man asleep, and had told the servant to throw away the medicine. It *was* thrown away ; and no crime rested upon Helen Lyle.
She

She had come back as has been told, and had found herself, as she had thought, too late. Now that the doctor heard what had been her own confession, he was able to remember what her seeming agony of mind had been, when she had found the empty cup ; and when it was all told what Helen Lyle had written of her husband's power over her, those there, even against their will — and certainly against their own confession — almost turned to look behind, expecting to see his face, as if, in the memory of what it was, there was an influence still.

And now John Dryden knew what was that love which hung about him for those days, when the blood within him seemed to burn ; and he felt he might have thought before, that a watcher so unresting must have been a mother.

To this day her grave amidst the hills is pointed out — by those who tell what Ruy Lyle once was — as that of the mad woman Meg.

John Dryden, some months later, took
° 4 possession

possession of the Hall ; and for days the people living at St. Hilda's kept one unbroken holiday.

Mona, as she went through, what at last was hers, on the evening of her coming, found herself sitting where she once had sat in the great drawing-room upon the evening of that Christmas-day ; and she almost thought that she could see Ruy Lyle at her feet, just as he had kneeled there then, and that she could hear him asking her to be his queen.

As she thought of it, it almost seemed too real ; and when she felt a hand touch hers, she feared to see him and Meg, as Meg had stood before her on that night.

"How you tremble, Mona," and she turned at the sound of that voice and trembled no more ; for it was her husband's hand that touched her own.

"I must seem very foolish, but it was here that Ruy Lyle first asked me to be his wife — no, it was not quite that — where he asked me if I could be his queen, and when I felt your hand, the past came
back

back again, and I almost feared to see him here."

"There was something terrible, something that seemed always growing in that man's influence, Mona, and it was so much the worse, because out of it he made religious capital, and he has left his imitators who will not object to his means, because they want his profits; but it makes me shudder still to think of what he was. There are those below who are waiting for you;" and Mona, as she saw her husband's people stretching round the table, felt there was no penalty to her queendom now.

It was about this time, that a living near to Windermere was offered Crispin Ken. He might look round his own cure, and see how his work had been blessed.

He, and such as he, are hardly ever spoken of in books, as public judgment writes about the Ruy Lyles it bows before — till something they do clumsily finds them out — and he would have a great deal rather stayed on there where
he

he could see at the harvest, what came of some of the seed it had been permitted him to sow.

In the cure that had been offered him, there was not temptation for every sort of man. He would have to do that work again, as it had been perilled for about twenty years by what was called a "delightful preacher," and who having seen his own example bearing fruit in every form of schism, was called away to be a Dean.

It had long been contemplated making the two cures of St. Hilda's the great and St. Hilda's the less one, and of building a new church, that would hold all of both the cures united, if all would come; and the cures were so small, and together only reached about two miles, that this at last was carried out.

Crispin Ken took the living that was offered him at Windermere; but he could leave the work that he had almost finished, without fearing to John Dryden.

Silas Thane had left, though Crispin
knew

knew that he would meet with him again; for the dissenter had taken a roomy coach-house in the parish to which Crispin was going, in opposition to about a dozen other sects that the concessions of the late incumbent gave occasion for.

It was a great day at St. Hilda's when the chapel was pulled down, and every one within the cure, not excepting the pawnbroker, came to church together.

Crispin Ken had hardly ever dared to hope for this; but he saw something of what his influence for good had built up there, in what it had assisted to pull down.

And there are others, if not with the same reward, with the same purpose, scattered up and down this land, doing their work too faithfully to be preferred where political necessity wants capital; but too faithfully to be forgotten in the last addition.

In that parish, Crispin Ken had well done his labour. Those who had known him as their priest had known him as their friend.

friend. There is a great peril in these days to a man even being thought quite serious, who does not drag religion into everything. A man will not the less see God's hand in God's works, because he does not make every street corner a site for a sermon. It had not been his way to draw up the children of the schools when the grass was down, and whilst their mouths were full of curds and whey, to tell them that the hay-cocks were monuments to God; and in that outer world which "Evangelical Protestantism" is generally allowed to leaven, Crispin Ken was with great unanimity written down extreme. Nor was he fool enough to seek to set aside the verdict.

The day of his marriage with Ivy Thane was now determined on, and that day was very near.

Florence Seton remembered nothing of what her own hopes might have been; and she loved Ivy Thane, though not "as a sister," for amongst some women that fictitious affinity is often not to be entirely desired,

desired, nor is it at all likely she will be always Florence Seton.

Miss Strake, after a great deal of characteristic indecision, went to live in a little back street at Bath. Miss Strake, for almost as long as she had lived, which, by her own showing was not very long, had always fancied preachers and long whist ; but it is not to be supposed that she coupled them together.

Her difficulty was, that she thought she was of too tender years to keep house with propriety anywhere, alone.

“ You know, Mr. Dryden,” she said, just before her band-box was labelled “ Bath,” “ that although there are a great many excellent ministers in Bath, it is a gay place, and we young people must be jealous of appearances.”

Indeed, Miss Strake was, perhaps, rather sorry that those gentlemen, who had presented themselves at the time when she had set her heart on a curate, and nothing else, had apparently withdrawn themselves,
as

as though the change in her circumstances pointed to a change in their feelings.

"That might be very well if I was an old woman," she said to herself. And so did Miss Strake, as she withdrew to Bath, set her own age against the power of the dross.

The doctor came to be very hopeful about Jack's leg, which certainly grew longer; and what Jack now had to eat and drink was all in his favour.

Crispin Ken was married to Ivy Thane; and it was a great day for those people in whose midst Crispin had been born; and Crispin Ken, as they drove away to Windermere, could see, when almost all that he had loved was out of sight, John Dryden standing side by side with Mona, waiving their hands, from the top of that which had once been the chapel's corner stone.

It is the last day, of the first month, of the married life of Crispin Ken.

They had come to that which is to be their home, and where may there be
another

another lot like that which measures out to us our share in God's own work upon the banks of Windermere? This was to be their lot; there were they to live, and when they came to die, rest—till they should blend anew—on that high hill's side.

The evening of that day was warm, and they went up to the church which looked down upon the lake; there were the voices of the children within the shadowy aisle, chorussing the Sunday's hymn. Behind the church where it was sheltered, had stood some years a yew, over the grave of those who had been lords of many of those hills. Crispin, when he heard that hymn go up, and remembered how he then stood there upon the margin of a life where all was new, where all he had been blessed in doing, must be done again, almost feared for what might be.

And Ivy saw from his face, that there was that upon his heart which bore him down; and she came to his side and took his hand, and asked for her share, in his new care, with him. "What

"What is it? Nothing, Ivy! Nothing, darling! I only feared that we might fail in the work that is before us;" and he saw a smile on her face, as he watched her brightening eye.

"I was thinking, Crispin, of that star, just now hidden by this tree, when we may be sometimes overshadowed as that was; but look! it is not hidden now."

And as she spoke, Ivy like, she clung to him, whilst Crispin felt the meaning of her words, for the star stood high above the shadows of the yew.

The End.



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